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E S S A Y

ON THE

STUDY of LITERATURE.

Written Originally in FRENCH,
By EDWARD GIBBON, Jun. Esq;

Now first translated into ENGLISH.

L O N D O N :

Printed for T. BECKET and P. A. DE HONDT,
in the Strand. MDCCLXIV.

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T O

EDWARD GIBBON, Esq;

Dear Sir,

NO performance is, in my opinion, more contemptible, than a Dedication of the common sort; when some great man is presented with a book, which, if Science be the subject, he is incapable of understanding; if polite Literature, incapable of tasting: and this ho-

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nor

DEDICATION.

nor is done him, as a reward for virtues, which he neither does, nor desires to, possess. I know but two kinds of dedications, which can do honor either to the patron or author. The first is, when an unexperienced writer addresses himself to a master of the art, in which he endeavours to excel; whose example he is ambitious of imitating; by whose advice he has been directed, or whose approbation he is anxious to deserve.

The

DEDICATION.

The other sort is yet more honourable. It is dictated by the heart, and offered to some person who is dear to us, because he ought to be so. It is an opportunity we embrace with pleasure of making public those sentiments of esteem, of friendship, of gratitude, or of all together, which we really feel, and which therefore we desire should be known.

I hope, dear Sir, my past conduct will easily lead you
to

DEDICATION.

to discover to what principle you should attribute this epistle; which, if it surprizes, will, I hope, not displease you. If I am capable of producing any thing worthy the attention of the public, it is to you that I owe it; to that truly paternal care, which, from the first dawning of my reason, has always watched over my education, and afforded me every opportunity of Improvement. Permit me here to express my grateful sense
of

DEDICATION.

of your tenderness to me, and to assure you, that the study of my whole life shall be to acquit myself, in some measure, of obligations I can never fully repay.

I am,

dear Sir,

with the sincerest

affection and regard,

your most dutiful son,

and faithful servant,

May the 28th,
1761.

E. GIBBON, Junior.

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AN
ESSAY
ON THE
Study of Literature.

I. **T**HE history of empires is that ^{Idea of li-}
of the miseries of humankind : ^{terary His-}
the history of the sciences is that of their ^{tory.}
splendour and happiness. If a thousand
other considerations render the study of
the latter interesting to the philosopher,
this reflection alone is sufficient to recom-
mend it to every friend of mankind.

II. How ardently do I wish a truth so
consolatory admitted of no exception!

B

But

But alas! the man too often intrudes on the retirement of the student: and hence even in his closet, that asylum of contemplative wisdom, he is still misled by his prejudices, agitated by his passions, or debased by his follies.

The influence of fashion is founded on the inconstancy of man; the causes of its despotism being as frivolous as the effects of its tyranny are fatal. Men of letters are nevertheless afraid to cast off its yoke, and, tho' reflection causes some delay in their submission, it serves to render it but the more disgraceful.

All ages and countries have given a preference, not seldom unjustly, to some particular science, while they permitted others to languish and sink into a contempt equally unreasonable. Thus Logic
and

and Metaphysics under the successors of
Alexander *, Polity and Elocution during
the

* This age was that of those philosophical sects,
who battled for the systems of their respective mas-
ters, with all the obstinacy of polemical divines.

A fondness for systems necessarily produces an at-
tachment to general principles, and this of course
brings on a contempt for an attention to parti-
culars.

" The fondness for systems (says Mr. Freret)
" which possessed the successors of Aristotle, made
" the Greeks abandon the study of nature, and
" stopped the progress of their philosophical dis-
" coveries. Subtlety of argument took place of
" experiment; the accurate sciences, Geometry,
" Astronomy, and the true Philosophy disappeared
" almost entirely. None gave themselves the
" trouble to acquire new principles; but all were
" employed in ranging, combining, and modelling
" those, they imagined they knew, into systems.
" Hence arose so many different sects. The great-
" est geniuses lost themselves in the abstruseness and

the Roman republic, History and Poetry in the Augustan age, Grammar and Jurisprudence in that of the Lower Empire, the Scholastic Philosophy in the thirteenth century, and the Belles Lettres, till within the times of our fathers, have all in their turns shared the admiration and contempt of mankind.

Natural Philosophy and the Mathematics are now in possession of the throne: their sister sciences fall prostrate before

“ obscurity of Metaphysics, wherein words generally supplied the place of things; and thus Logic, denominated by Aristotle an implement of the understanding, became among his followers the principal, and almost the sole, object of their attention. Their whole lives were spent in studying the art of reasoning, without ever reasoning at all; or at least without reasoning on any other than trivial and unimportant subjects.”

Mem. de l'Acad. des B. L. tom. vi. p. 150.

them;

them ; are ignominiously chained to their car, or otherwise fervilely employed to adorn their triumph. Perhaps their reign too is short, and their fall approaching.

It would be a task worthy a man of abilities, to trace that revolution in religion, government and manners, that hath successively bewildered, wasted, and corrupted mankind. It were prudent for him therein not to seek hypotheses, but much more so not to avoid them.

III. If the Greeks had never been reduced to slavery, the Romans had been still barbarians. Constantinople falling before the sword of Mahomet, the Muses were abandoned to fortune, till assembled and patronized by the Medici. This illustrious family encouraged Literature. Erasmus did still more ; he cultivated letters

Restoration of the
Belles
Lettres.

The public taste
for them.

himself, while Homer and Cicero became familiar to climes unknown to Alexander, and Nations unconquered by Rome. In those days it was thought a fine accomplishment to study and admire the Ancients *; in ours, it is judged more easy and polite to neglect and despise them. I am apt to think there is some reason on both sides. The foldier then read them in his tent; the statesman studied them in his closet. Even the fair sex, usually content with the empire of the graces, and

* By turning over the Latin Bibliotheque of Fabricius, the best of mere compilers, we shall see that in the space of forty years after the invention of printing, almost all the Latin authors issued from the press, some of them more than once. It is true, the taste of the editors was by no means equal to their zeal. The writers of the Augustan history appeared before Livy; and an edition of Aulus-Gellius was given before any body thought of Virgil.

willing

willing to resign superior knowledge to ours, were subject to the contagion ; and every Delia wished to find a Tibullus in the person of her lover. It was from Herodotus that Elizabeth (a sovereign whose name is revered in the annals of Literature) learnt to maintain the rights of humanity against another Xerxes. It was in Æschylus * she saw her magnanimity celebrated under the names of the victorious heroes of Salamis. † Christina preferred

* Æschylus has written a tragedy, wherein he has painted, in the most lively colours, the triumph of the Greeks and the consternation of the Persians, after that fatal battle. See le Theatre des Grecs du P. Brumoy, tom. ii. p. 171, &c.

† The president Henault, in speaking of that Princess, says, “ She was a great scholar : and that, “ being one day in conversation with Calignon,

B 4

“ after-

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ferred knowlege to the government of a kingdom; for which the politician may despise, and the philosopher will probably blame her. The man of letters, however, cannot fail to cherish the memory of that Princess, who not only studied the Ancients herself, but even rewarded their commentators. It was by her that Sau-maise was honoured with marks of distinction; who, tho' he did not deserve the admiration in which his coterporaries held

“ afterwards Chancellor of Navarre, she shewed him
 “ a Latin translation she had made of some tragedies of Sophocles, and of two orations of Demosthenes. She permitted him also to take a copy
 “ of a Greek epigram of her own composition;
 “ and asked his opinion concerning some passages of
 “ Lycophron, which she had then in her hands,
 “ and from which she intended to translate some particular parts.”

Abreg. Chronolog. 4to. Paris, 1752. p. 397.

him,

him, was above that contempt thrown upon him by his successors.

IV. This Princess, without doubt, carried her regard for such writers too far. ^{That taste carried too far.} For my part, tho' sometimes their advocate, never their partisan, I will freely confess I think them as coarse in their manners, as they were minute and trifling in their works. A pedantic erudition cramping the efforts of their imagination, they were rather dull compilers than ingenious Scholiasts. The age was just enlightened enough to perceive the utility of their researches, but neither sensible, nor polished sufficiently to know what advantages they might have reaped, by the light of Philosophy.

V. At length the day appeared. Def- ^{When it became more reasonable.} cartes indeed was not eminent in letters: polite literature however is extremely ob-
liged

liged to him. An acute philosopher*, who inherited his manner, investigated the true elements of criticism. Bossu, Boileau, Rapin and Brumoy informed the public also of the value of those treasures it had in its possession. One of those societies, that have better immortalized the name of Lewis XIV. than all the pernicious triumphs of his ambition, had already begun its researches; societies, in which we see erudition, precision of sentiment and politeness united; in which we meet with so many important discoveries, and sometimes, what hardly yields to discoveries, a modest and learned ignorance.

If men employed their reason as much in their actions as in their conversation,

* Mr. Le Clerc, in his excellent treatise on the art of criticism, and in many other of his works.
the

the Belles-Lettres would not only engage the esteem of the wise, but become equally the object of vulgar admiration.

VI. It is from this æra we may date the commencement of their decline. The decline of the Belles Lettres. Le Clerc, to whom both freedom and science are indebted, complained of it above sixty years ago. But it was in the famous dispute, concerning the ancients and the moderns, that Letters received the mortal blow. Never sure was carried on so unequal a combat! The strict logic of Teraſſon; the refined philosophy of Fontenelle; the elegant and happy manner of De la Motte; the sprightly raillery of St. Hyacinthe; all joined in concert to reduce Homer to a level with Chapelain. The adversaries of this formidable band answered them only by an attention to trifles; with I know not what pretensions to

to natural superiority in the ancients ; with prejudice, abuse and quotations. The laugh was entirely against them ; while the ancients, who were the subject of the dispute, came in for a share of the ridicule that burst on their defenders : that agreeable nation, which had unthinkingly adopted the principle of Lord Shaftesbury, not making any distinction between the False and the Ridiculous.

Our Philosophers have ever since affected to be astonished, that men can pass their whole lives, in acquiring the knowledge of mere words and facts, in burthening the memory without improving the understanding. At the same time, our men of wit are sufficiently sensible of the advantages they derive from the ignorance of their readers, and therefore
load

load the ancients with contempt, as well as those who make them their study *.

VII. To this picture let me subjoin a ^{Greatmen} few reflections, which may fix a just esti- ^{men of} mation on the Belles Lettres. ^{letters.}

The examples of great men prove nothing. Cassini, before he acquired a name for his astronomical discoveries, had busied himself with judicial astrology †. When such examples, however, are numerous, they prejudice the mind in favour of an enquiry, the event of which they serve afterwards to confirm. One must immediately conceive that a mind capable of thinking for itself, a lively and

* Fontenelle in his digression concerning the ancients and moderns, and elsewhere.

Ouvres de Gresset. tom. ii. p. 45.

† Fontenelle dans son Eloge.

Voltaire, tom. xvii. p. 79.
bril-

brilliant imagination, can never relish a science that depends solely on the memory. Yet of those whose superior talents have successively instructed mankind, many have applied themselves entirely to the study of the Belles Lettres; still more have encouraged and in a less degree cultivated them; but not one, at least hardly one, of them all, ever held them in contempt. All antiquity was known to Grotius; a knowledge that enabled him to unfold the Sacred Oracles, to combat ignorance and superstition, to soften the calamities and mitigate the horrors of war.

If Descartes, devoted entirely to his Philosophy, despised every kind of study that had not an immediate affinity with

it, Newton * did not disdain to form a system of Chronology which has had both its advocates and admirers : Gassendi, the greatest Philosopher among the men of letters, and the greatest man of letters among the Philosophers, not only defended the doctrines of Epicurus, but critically explained his writings : Leibnitz laid aside his profound researches into history, to employ himself in the more abstruse researches of the Mathematics. Had his edition of the *Capella* appeared, his example alone in that valuable acquisition to the literary world, had justified the conduct of all those who apply themselves to letters †. An eternal monument exists,

* Newton discovered mistakes of 5 or 6 hundred years in the common Chronology and reformed it accordingly. See my critical remarks on that Chronology.

† See the life of Leibnitz, by de Neufville, prefixed to his *Theodoea*.

how-

however, of the united efforts of erudition and genius, in the Dictionary of Mr. Bayle.

Men of
letters
great
men.

VIII. If we confine ourselves to such as have devoted almost all their time and study to literature, the reader of taste will always know how to distinguish the subtle and extensive wit of Erasmus; the accuracy of Casaubon and Gerard Vossius; the readiness of Justus-Lipsius; the taste and delicacy of Taneguy-le-Febvre; the resources and fertility of Isaac Vossius; the daring penetration of Bentley; the agreeable manner of Massieu and de Fraguier; the solid and ingenious criticism of Sallier; and the profound philosophical genius of Le Clerc and Freret. He will never confound these truly-great men with such mere compilers as Gruter, Saumaïse, Masson, and many others, whose works, tho' not
alto-

altogether useless, seldom gratify taste, never excite admiration, and in general only lay claim to the lowest kind of approbation.

IX. The ancients have left models for ^{TASTE.}
such writers as dare to copy after them, ^{Three}
and lectures to others, from which they may ^{sources of}
deduce the principles of true taste, and ^{beauty.}
learn to employ their leisure in the study
of those valuable productions, wherein
truth appears embellished with all the
graces of the imagination.

It is the province of Poets and Orators
to paint the beauties of nature. The whole
universe supplies them with tints: of that
infinite variety, however, which on every
side presents itself, the images they em-
ploy may be ranged in three classes; those
relating to man, to nature, and to art. The

C

images

images of the first class, or those which compose the picture of man, his greatness, his meanness, his passions, his caprices; these are they which conduct the writer in the surest path to immortality. Every time one reads Euripides or Terence, one discovers new beauties. It is not, however, to the disposition or conduct of their performances, which are in this respect often defective; nor is it to their delicacy or simplicity of stile, that these Poets owe their reputation. No, the heart beholds the picture of itself in their just and lively descriptions, and confesses it with pleasure.

Nature, vast and extensive as it is, hath furnished the Poets with but few images. Confined by the nature of the object, or the prejudices of mankind, to the exterior of things, they have succeeded only in painting the successive variety of the seasons ;

seasons; a sea agitated by storms; the Zephyrs, wafting love and pleasure on the breeze, and the like. A few writers of genius were enow to exhaust these images.

X. Those of art remained. - By the ^{Artificial} images of art I mean all those things, ^{images.} by which men have embellished, defaced, or diversified nature, religion, laws or custom. The Poets have universally made free with all these, and it must be owned they were in the right. Their fellow-countrymen understood them with ease, and perused them with pleasure. They were pleased to see the genius of their great men exercised on things which had made their ancestors respectable, on subjects they revered as sacred, or practised as useful.

XI. The manners of the ancients were ^{The man-} more favourable to Poetry than ours; ^{ners of the} ^{ancients} ^{favourable} ^{to poetry.} which

which is a strong presumption they surpassed us in that sublime art.

In the military art.

In proportion as the arts grew more perfect, they grew less complex; in war, in politics, in religion, the most important effects have proceeded from the most simple causes.

Doubtless a Marshal Saxe and a Duke of Cumberland * understood the art of war better than an Achilles or an Ajax :

* I did not here seek for an opportunity of paying a compliment to his Royal Highness, the Duke of Cumberland, whose birth and rank I respect, without presuming to judge of his military talents. If it be considered that the following lines are taken from a poem on the battle of Fontenoy, the reader will see, it is rather Mr. Voltaire than myself that here speaks.

“ Tels

“ Tels ne parurent point aux rives du Sca-
“ mandre,
“ Sous ces murs tant vantés que Pyrrhus mit
“ en cendre,
“ Ces antiques héros qui montés sur un Char
“ Combattoient en désordre & marchoient au
“ hazard *.

Are the battles, however, which are described by the French Poet, diversified like those of the Greek ? Are his heroes equally interesting ? The single combats of the chiefs, the long conversations held with the dying, the unexpected rencounters we meet with ; all betray the imperfection of the military art ; but furnish the Poet with the means of making us acquainted with his heroes, and interesting us in their good or ill fortune. At present, armies are vast machines animated by the breath

* Oeuvres de Voltaire, tom. ii. p. 300.

of their General. The muse denies her assistance in the description of their evolutions : she is afraid to penetrate the clouds of powder and smoke, that conceal from her sight alike the coward and the brave, the private centinel and the commander in chief.

In govern-
ment.

XII. The ancient republics of Greece were ignorant of the first principles of good policy. The people met in tumultuous assemblies rather to determine than to deliberate. Their factions were impetuous and lasting ; their insurrections frequent and terrible ; their most peaceful hours full of distrust, envy and confusion * : The citizens were indeed unhappy ; but their

* See Thucydides, book iii. also Diodorus Siculus, from the xith book to the xxth, almost throughout. Also the Preface of the Abbé Teraillon to the 3d vol. of his translation of Diodorus Siculus—Also Hume's Political Essays.

writers,

writers, whose imaginations were warmed by such dreadful objects, described them naturally as they were felt. A peaceable administration of the laws; those salutary institutions, which, projected in the cabinet of a Sovereign or his council, diffuse happiness over a whole nation, excite only the Poet's admiration, the coldest of all the passions.

XIII. The ancient mythology, which ^{In religion.} attributed life and intelligence to all nature, extended its influence to the pen of the Poet. Inspired by the muse, he sung the attributes, the adventures and misfortunes of his fabulous deities. That Infinite Being, which religion and philosophy have made known to us, is above such description: the sublimest flights become puerile on such a subject. The almighty *Fiat* of Moses strikes us with admiration*; but

* See the pieces of Huet and Despreaux, in the 3d vol. of the works of the latter.

reason cannot comprehend, nor imagination describe, the operations of a deity, at whose command alone millions of worlds are made to tremble: nor can we read with any satisfactory pleasure of the devil, in Milton, warring for two whole days in heaven against the armies of the Omnipotent *.

* The golden compasses, with which the Creator, in Milton, measures the universe, excite surprize. Perhaps, however, it is puerile in him; tho' such an image had been truly sublime in Homer. Our philosophical ideas of the Deity are injurious to the Poet. The same attributes debase our Divinity which would have extolled the Jupiter of the Greeks. The sublime genius of Milton was cramped by the system of our religion, and never appeared to so great an advantage as when he shook it a little off; while on the contrary, Propertius, a cold and insipid declaimer, owes all his reputation to the agreeable pictures of his Mythology.

The

The ancients knew their advantages, and profited by them accordingly. Of this the masterly performances we still admire are the best proofs.

XIV. But we, who are placed in another The
clime, and born in another age, are necessa- means of
rily at a loss to see those beauties, for want perceiving
of being able to place ourselves in the same their beau-
point of view with the Greeks and Ro- ties.
mans. A circumstantial knowlege of their
situation and manners can only enable us
to do this. The superficial ideas, the poor
information we glean from a commentary,
assist us only to seize the more palpable
and apparent beauties: all the graces, all
the delicacies of their writings escape us;
and we are apt to abuse their cotermpo-
raries for want of taste, in lavishing such
encomiums on those merits we are too ig-
norant to discover. An acquaintance with
anti-

antiquity is the only true comment on the writings of the ancients: but what is still more necessary, is a certain turn of mind, which is generally the result of it; a sentiment not only making things known, but familiarizing them to our ideas, and inducing us to regard them with the eyes of ancients. The famous example of Perault may serve to illustrate my meaning. The rudeness of the heroic ages shocked the delicacy of the Parisian. It was in vain that Boileau remonstrated to him, that Homer designed and ought to describe Greeks and not Frenchmen: his judgment was convinced it was right, but he could not be persuaded to be pleased*. A small portion of antique taste, if I may so call it, would have done more than all the reasonings of his antagonist.

* See Despreaux's remarks on Longinus.

XV. I have said that the Poets were Artificial
 in the right to make use of artificial ima- images
 ges; but I know not whether at the tri- depend on
 bunal of fame it will be allowed me. We love of
 are all fond of reputation; but nothing is fame.
 more different than the nature and de-
 gree of our passion for fame. Every man
 has different notions in his desire of re-
 putation. One writer, for instance, seeks
 only the praise of his cotemporaries. Death
 puts an end to his hopes and fears of cen-
 sure or applause; he cares not, if in the
 tomb that encloses his body be buried also
 his name. Such a man may, without
 scruple, employ familiar and temporary
 images, in writing for those whom only
 he desires to please. Another, on the
 contrary, bequeaths his name to latest pos-
 terity*; and pleases himself in thinking
 that a thousand years after his death, the

* See Mallet's life of Bacon, p. 27.

Indian on the banks of the Ganges, and the Laplander on his hills of snow; will read his works, and envy the happy clime and æra that produced so extraordinary a genius.

Those who are ambitious to please universally, must deduce their images from the common resources of mankind, from the human heart and the representations of nature. Pride only can induce writers to exceed these bounds. They may presume, indeed, that the occult beauties of their writings will always secure a family of Burmans, to labour in their explication, and to admire the text the more because they themselves have written the comment.

And on
the nature
of the
subj. et.

XVI. It is not, however, the character of the author altogether, but that of his work, which influences him in this particu-

particular. The sublimer species of Poetry, the epopeia, the tragedy, the ode, seldom employ the same images as comedy and satire; because the former are chiefly descriptive of the passions, and the latter of manners. Horace and Plautus are almost unintelligible to those who have not learnt to live and think as the Romans. The rival of the latter, the elegant Terence, is better understood, because he has sacrificed pleasantry to taste; whereas Plautus has even prostituted decency to mirth. Terence, one is apt to think, imagined he was describing the Athenians: his pieces are all over Greek, excepting the language *. Plautus knew

* See Teren. Eunuch. act ii. sc. 2. Heauton, act i. sc. 1. The *Cupedinarii* Terence speaks of, disprove not the truth of this reflection. That word, tho' we should not adopt the conjecture of Sumaise, was become from a proper name an appellative. See Terence Eunuch, act ii. sc. 2.

that

that he wrote for the entertainment of the Romans; and therefore with him we find, at Thebes, at Athens, at Calydon, the manners, laws, and even the public buildings, of Rome *.

Contrast
between
the infan-
cy and
splendour
of the Ro-
mans.

XVII. In heroic poesy, altho' manners be not the principal objects of the piece, they are made use of as ornamental in the remote and distant shadowings of the picture. It is impossible to comprehend the design, the art, the circumstantial beauties of Virgil, without a perfect knowlege of the history, the government, and the religion of the Romans; of the geography of ancient Italy; the character of Augustus; and of that particular and singular rela-

* Amphytrion, act. i. sc. 1. Quid faciam nunc, si Tresviri me in carcerem compegerint, &c.

tion he bore to the senate and the people*. Nothing could be more striking, or interesting to this people, than the contrast between Rome, with its three thousand citizens living in hovels thatched with straw †, and the same Rome the metropolis of the universe, whose houses were palaces, whose citizens Princes, and whose provinces were extensive empires. As Florus has remarked this contrast, it is not to be thought Virgil was regardless of it. He has struck it off in a most masterly manner. Evander conducts his guest thro' that village, where every thing, even

* See the Dissertations of Mr. de la Bleterie on the authority of the Emperors, in the Memoirs of the academy of the Belles-Lettres. Vol. xix. p. 357. Vol. xxi. p. 299, &c. Vol. xxiv. p. 261, &c. p. 297, &c.

† Varro de lingua Latina, lib. iv.—Dionysius Halicarnas. lib. xi. p. 76. Plutarch. in Rom.

its monarch, was all rusticity. He explains its antiquities ; while the Poet gives artfully to understand for whom this village, this future capitol, concealed beneath tufts and briars, was reserved *. How lively and striking a picture ! How speaking, how expressive is this to a man versed in antiquity ! How lifeless and unmeaning to those who are no otherwise prepared to read Virgil than by a natural taste for letters, and a knowledge of the language.

The address of Virgil.

XVIII. The better one is acquainted with antiquity ; the more one admires the art and address of the Poet. His subject,

* Virgil. *Æneid.* lib. viii. ver. 185 to 370.

Hinc ad Tarpeiam sedem, et capitolia ducit
Aurea nunc, olim sylvestribus horrida dumis.

—————Armenta videbant
Romanosque foro et lautis mugire carinis.

it

it must be confessed, was flat enough. The flight of a band of refugees; their squabbles with a few villagers, and the settling of a paltry town; these were the boasted labours, the great exploits of the pious Æneas. But the Poet has dignified them, and in so doing has had art enough to render them interesting. By an illusion, too refined not to have escaped the generality of readers, and too excellent to displease the critic, he hath embellished the rude manners of the heroic ages, but has done it without disguising them *.

The

* Nothing is more difficult for a writer, educated in scenes of luxury, than to describe simplicity without meanness. Read the epistle of Penelope, in Ovid, and you will be disgusted with that rusticity which gives so much delight, in Homer. In the writings of Madam Scudery, you will be as disagreeably surprized to find, in the court of Tomyris, the splen-

D

dour

The herdsman Latinus, and the quarrelsome Turnus, are indeed elevated into great monarchs. All Italy trembles for the cause of liberty : and Æneas triumphs over gods and men. Virgil knew how to reflect all the glory of the Romans on their Trojan ancestors. The founder of Rome eclipses that of Lavinium. It is a fire that kindles, and presently blazes over the face of the earth. Æneas, if I may so venture to express myself, contained the germe of all his descendants. When besieged in his camp, he naturally calls to mind a

dour of that of Louis the XIVth. One must be formed for such manners to hit off their genuine simplicity. Reflection has supplied the place of experience in Virgil, and perhaps in Fenelon. They knew it was necessary to elevate them a little, in conformity to the delicacy of their age and country ; but they knew that delicacy would be shocked at too taudry embellishments.

Cæsar

Cæsar and an Alexis. We cannot divide our admiration between them.

But Virgil never displayed greater address than when, descended with his hero, to the shades, his imagination seemed at full liberty. Yet here he neither created new nor imaginary beings. Romulus and Brutus, Scipio and Cæsar appeared, such as they had been in life, the admiration or terrour of Rome.

XIX. One reads the Georgics with that lively taste the beautiful excites, and that exquisite pleasure the charms of the subject naturally inspire, in a susceptible mind. It is easy to conceive, however, that our admiration would be increased, by discovering in the Poet a design equally noble and elevated, as the execution of it is highly finished. I constantly draw my

Of the
Georgics.

examples from Virgil. His fine verses, and the precepts of his friend Horace, fixed the standard of taste among the Romans, and may serve to convey instruction to the most distant posterity. But to explain my sentiments more clearly, it is necessary to trace things a little farther.

The Roman veterans.

XX. The Romans first fought for glory and for their country. After the siege of Veiaæ * they received some small pay, and sometimes were recompensed after a triumph †: but they received these as gratuities, and not as their due. At the end of every war, the soldiers, becoming citizens, retired to their respective huts,

* Livy, book iv. c. 59, 60.

† Livy, book xxx. c. 45, &c. Arbuthnot's Tables, p. 181, &c.

and

and hung up their useless arms, to be resumed at the first signal.

When Sylla restored the public tranquillity, circumstances were much altered. Above three hundred thousand men, accustomed to luxury and slaughter *, without substance, without home, without principle, required rewards. Had the dictator paid them in money, according to the rate afterwards established by Augustus, it had cost him upwards of thirty-two millions, of our money †; an immense
sum

* Sallust. in Bell. Catilin. p. 22. Edit. Thyf.

† This rate allowed 3000 drachmas, or 12000 sesterces to every private foot-soldier, (1) twice that sum to each of the cavalry and to a centurion, and four times as much to a tribune. (2) The Ro-

(1) Dion. Cass.

(2) Wotton's History of Rome, p. 154.

sum in the most prosperous times, but then absolutely out of the power of the re-

man legion, after the augmentation made by Marius, (3) consisted of 6000 infantry, and 300 horse. This considerable corps, however, had but sixty-six officers, that is sixty centurions and six tribunes. So that the account stood thus.

L. Sterling.

282,000 private men at 3000 drachma's or 12,000 sesterces, or 105 l. Ster- ling each	}	28,905,000
2,820 centurions and 14,100 horse at 6000 drachmas, or 210 l. Sterling each		
282 tribunes at 12,000 drachmas, or 410 l. each	}	115,620

Sum total L. 32,489,220

According to Dr. Arbuthnot's calculations, it should be only 30,705,220 l. the drachma being worth only $7d. \frac{3}{4}$ English money. (4) But, from the researches I have made, I find that the Attic drachma of later years, was equal to a Roman denier both in weight and value. and worth $8d. \frac{1}{2}$ of our money. (5)

(3) R. fin. antiq. p. 964.

(4) Arbuth. Tables, p. 15.

(5) Manuscript remarks on the weights, &c. of the ancients. Hooper, p. 108, and Eiffenschmidt, p. 23, &c.

public to discharge. Sylla, therefore, embraced an expedient, rather dictated by necessity, and his own private interest, than the good of the commonwealth: he distributed the lands among the veterans, and accordingly forty-seven legions were immediately dispersed over Italy. Four and twenty military colonies were thus settled *: ruinous expedient ! It could not be otherwise ; for if they were intermixed with the natives of the soil, they changed their habitations to find out their old acquaintance ; and if they settled in a body, there was an army ready disciplined for any seditious general who would lead them to the field. These warriors, however, soon grew tired of an inactive life, and thinking it beneath them to earn by the sweat of their brows, what could only cost them a

* Livy, lib. lxxxix.—Epitom. Freinshem. Suppl. lib. lxxxix. c. 34.

little blood *, they soon dissipated their new substance in debaucheries, and, seeing no prospect of repairing their fortunes but by a civil war, they readily and powerfully entered into the designs of Catiline †. Augustus, embarrassed in like manner, followed the same plan, and was justly apprehensive of the same fatal consequences. Still smoked in Italy the ashes of those fires its expiring liberty had kindled.

“ Des feux qu’a rallumé sa liberté mourante ‡.

The hardy veterans had not acquired possessions but by a bloody war; and the frequent acts of violence they committed

* Tacitus, de Moribus Germanorum, p. 441.

† Sallust. in Bell. Catilin. p. 40. Cicero in Catilin. Orat. ii.

‡ Racin. Mithridate, act iii. sc. 1.

plainly

plainly shewed they still thought themselves at liberty to keep them, sword in hand •.

XXI. In such circumstances, what could be more conformable to the mild administration of Augustus, than to employ the harmonious lays of his friend, to reconcile these turbulent spirits to their new situation? To this end, therefore, he advised him to compose this work. The design of Virgil.

Da facilem cursum atque audacibus adhuc
cæptis

Ignarosque viæ, mecum miseratus agrestes

Ingrederere; et votis jam nunc assuesce vocari †.

• See Donatus, life of Virgil. Virgil. Eclog. ix. v. 2. &c.

† Georg. lib. i. v. 40.

Above

Above fifty writers on agriculture had nevertheless appeared among the Greeks *. The tracts also of Cato and Varro were more certain guides, as well as more circumstantial and exact in their precepts, than could be supposed those of a Poet. But it was more necessary to inspire the soldiers with a taste for a country life than to instruct them in the rudiments of husbandry. Calculated to this end were his affecting descriptions of the innocent pleasures of the peaceful rustic; of his sports, his domestic ease, his delightful retreats; how different from the frivolous amusements, or the still more frivolous bustle, of the busy world !

We may yet discover, in the composition of this beautiful piece, some of those

* Varro, de re rustica, lib. i. c. 1.

lively and unexpected strokes, of those artful and happy touches, which evince the talents of Virgil for satire; a species of writing which superior views and a natural goodness of heart prevented him from cultivating *. Not one of those veterans could fail of seeing himself in the picture of the aged Corycian †; who, inured to arms in his youth, is happy at last in the enjoyment of a solitary retreat, transformed, by his industry, from a wilderness into a paradise of sweets ‡.

The poor Italian, weary of a life so full of anxieties, laments with the Poet the

* *Hic petit excidiis urbem, miserosque penates,
Ut gemmâ bibat, et Sarrano dormiat ostro.*

Virg. Georg. lib. ii. v. 505.

† *Georg. lib. iv. v. 125, &c.*

‡ One of those pirates on whom Pompey bestowed lands. *Servius et Vellius Patercul.*

unhap-

unhappiness of the times, is concerned for
his Prince, borne down by the violence
of the veterans,

Ut cum carceribus sese effudere quadrigæ,
Addunt in spatium, et frustra retinacula ten-
dens

Fertur equis auriga, neque audit currus ha-
benas *.

and returns to his labour, animated with
the hopes of a second age of gold.

His suc-
cess.

XXII. Taken in this light, Virgil is
no longer to be considered as a mere
writer, describing the business of a rural
life; but as another Orpheus, who strikes
the lyre only to disarm savages of their
ferocity, and unite them in the peaceful
bonds of society †.

* Georg. lib. i. v. 512.

† Sylvestres homines facer interpretsque deorum
Cædibus et victu sædo deterruit Orpheus,
Dicitur ob hoc lenire tigres rabidosque leones.

Horat. Ars Poet. v. 391.

His

His Georgics actually produced this admirable effect. The veterans became insensibly reconciled to a quiet life, and passed without disturbance the thirty years that slipped away before Augustus had established, not without much difficulty, a military fund to pay them in money *.

XXIII. Aristotle, who introduced light Criticism. amidst the obscurity that clouded the works ^{An idea of} it. both of nature and art, was the father of criticism. Time, whose justice, slow yet sure, distinguished at length truth from error, hath demolished the statues of the philosopher, but hath confirmed the decisions of the critic. Destitute of observations, he hath advanced chimeras instead of facts. Formed in the school of Plato,

* Tillemont. Hist. des Emper. — Tacit. Annal. lib. i. p. 39. — Dionys. lib. iv. p. 565. — Suetonius in August. c. 49.

and by the writings of Homer, Sophocles, Euripides and Thucidides, he hath drawn his rules from the nature of things, and a knowledge of the human heart; illustrating them by examples from the greatest models of antiquity.

It is now two thousand years since the days ~~of~~ Aristotle. The critics have since improved their art; they are not, however, as yet agreed concerning the object of their pursuit. Le Clerc, Cousin, Des-Maiseaux, St. Martha*, have all defined it differently. For my part, I think every one of them too partial or too positive. Criticism is, in my opinion, the art of forming a judgment of writings and writers; of what they have said; of what they have said well, and what they have said

* Clerici ars critica, lib. i. c. i.

truly *. Under the first head are comprehended grammar, a knowledge of languages, and manuscripts; a capacity of distinguishing supposed from genuine performances, and of restoring the true reading of corrupted passages. Under the second, is included the whole theory of elocution and poesy. The third opens an immense field, the enquiry into the circumstances and truth of facts. Thus the whole generation of critics may be distinguished under three kinds, grammarians, rhetoricians and historians. The exclusive pretensions of the first have not only been prejudicial to their own endeavours, but to those of their whole fraternity.

* Historically so; the truth of their evidence, not of their opinions; the latter is in the province of logic rather than of criticism.

Materials
of criti-
cism.

XXIV. All that relates to what men are, or have been; all that creative genius hath invented; that the understanding hath considered; together with all which industry hath collected, are included in the department of criticism. A clear head, a fine taste, acute penetration, are all necessary to form a good critic. Follow the man of letters into his study, you will see him surrounded by the literary productions of all ages; his library is stocked with them; and his mind informed without being overburthened by their perusal. He looks about him on all sides; nor is the author, whose writings may have the most distant relation to the subject of his thoughts, forgotten: he may happen to meet there with some accidental and striking passage, to confirm the discoveries of the critic, or stagger his hypotheses. And

here



here ends the business of the scholar. The superficial reader looks no farther, but admires the reading and memory of the commentator; who is not less the dupe of the encomium, and mistakes the materials of building for the edifice itself.

XXV. But the true critic is sensible his task is only begun. He deliberates, compares, hesitates, and decides. Impartial as exact, he submits only to reason, or to authority *, which is reason with regard to facts. The most respectable names yield sometimes to the testimony of writers, who owe all their weight to momentary circumstances. The true critic, ready and fertile in resources, but void of false refinement, scruples not to sacrifice the most

The task
of a critic.

* That is to say, authority combined with experience.

E

brilliant,

brilliant, the most specious hypotheses to truth, nor presumes to talk to his masters in the language of mere conjecture. A professed advocate for the truth, he seeks that kind of proof his subject admits of, and is satisfied. He employs not the desperate scythe of analysis, in gathering those delicate flowers that shrink and fade at the least ungentle touch. At the same time, as little content with insipid admiration, he searches into the most secret emotions of the human heart, to discover the causes of his pleasure or disgust. Diffident and sensible, he deals not out conjectures as truths, reasonings for facts, or probabilities for demonstrations.

Criticism
good logic.

XXVI. Geometry has been called a good species of logic, which has been thought also a great encomium on that science:

as it is certainly more noble to display and improve the faculties of the human mind than to trace the limits of the material universe. But has not criticism also the same pretensions to logic? It has more: Geometry is employed only in demonstrations peculiar to itself: criticism deliberates between the different degrees of probability. It is by comparing these we daily regulate our actions, and often determine our future destiny *. Let us examine here some critical probabilities.

XXVII. The present age, which imagines itself destined to introduce change into every thing, has adopted an historical scepticism, as dangerous as it may be useful. M. de Pouilly, a sprightly and

Controversy on the Roman History.

* It is the elements of geometry and criticism that are here principally intended.

superficial genius, who generally quoted more than he read, was dubious concerning the certainty of the five first ages of Rome * ; but, little adapted for such kind of researches, he readily gave up the point to the erudition and criticisms of M. Freret and the Abbé Sallier †. M. de Beaufort revived this controversy ; and the Roman history has suffered not a little from the attacks of a writer, who not only knew to doubt, but to determine.

* A clear and precise definition of the certainty in dispute might have abridged the controversy. " It was an historical certainty." This certainty, however, varies in different ages. Thus, I believe in general in the existence and exploits of Charlemaine ; but my assurance thereof is not equal to that I have of the actions of Henry the Fourth.

† Mem. de l'Acad. des Belles Lettres, tom. vi.
P. 14. 190.

XXVIII. A treaty, concluded between the Romans and Carthaginians, became, in the hands of this author, a most powerful objection *. This treaty is found in Polybius, an historian accurate as sensible †. The original was in his time at Rome. And yet this authentic monument contradicted all the historians. It appeared by this, that L. Brutus and M. Horatius were consuls at the same time; altho' Horatius was not invested with the consulship till after the death of Brutus. Again, a people are therein called Roman subjects, who were at that time only allies, and we hear of the marine of a nation that began to construct ships only in the time of the first Punic war; two hundred and fifty years after the consulship of Bru-

Of a treaty between Rome and Carthage.

* Dissertation sur l'incertitude de l'hist. Rom. p. 33—46.

† Polyb. Hist. lib. iii. c. 22.

tus. What mortifying conclusions might not be drawn from these contradictions! How greatly to the disadvantage of the historians!

This treaty cleared up.

XXIX. This objection of Mr. de Beaufort greatly embarrassed his adversaries. They suspected the authenticity of the pretended original. They even altered its date. Let us see, if by a probable explanation, we cannot reconcile this monument with the historians. To do this we shall begin by separating the date from the body of the treaty. The former agrees with the time of Brutus: the latter resembles the manner of Polybius, or that of his Roman antiquaries. But the names of their consuls were never inserted in their solemn treaties, in the *fœdera* consecrated by all the ceremonies of their religion.

The

The ministers of that religion, the *feciales*, only signed them: and in this consisted the distinction between the *fœdera* and the *sponsiones*. The account of this circumstance, for which we are indebted to Livy*, obviates the difficulty. The antiquaries mistook the *feciales* for the consuls; and, without thinking of the mistake, as nothing obliged them to be precise in their explanation of their public monuments, they distinguished the year, of the expulsion of their kings, by the celebrated names of the author of their liberty, and the founder of the capitol. It little concerned them, whether they were consuls at the same time, or not.

* Spoponderunt consules, legati, quæstores, tribuni militum, nominaque eorum qui spoponderunt adhuc exstant, ubi si ex fœdere acta res esset præterquam duorum fecialium nomine extarent.

Tit. Liv. lib. ix. c. 5.

Of the
Roman
subjects.

XXX. The people of Ardea, Antium and Terracina, were not then subjects of Rome; at least, if they were, historians have given us very false ideas of the extent of that republic. Let us imagine ourselves existing in the time of Brutus; and we shall deduce, from the politics of the Romans, a definition of the term Ally, very different from what we should lay down at present. Rome, altho' the last colony of the Latins, begun very early to form the project of subjecting the whole nation to its laws. Its discipline and police, its heroes, its victories, soon manifested its incontestible superiority. The Romans, not less politic than bold, made use of this superiority with a discretion worthy of their good fortune. They knew well that cities badly subjected would stop the progress of their arms, would

waste the treasures, and corrupt the manners of the republic. Under the more specious name, therefore, of allies, they reconciled the vanquished to the yoke of submission; while the latter consented with pleasure to acknowledge Rome as the capital of the Latin nation, and to furnish it with a quota of troops in its wars. The republic, in return, afforded them only bare protection, the mark of that sovereignty which cost its vassals so dear. These people were indeed denominated allies to Rome; but they soon found themselves no better than her slaves.

XXXI. This explication, it may be said, diminishes the difficulty, but does not remove it. *Υπηκοοι*, the word Polybius in this place makes use of, taken in its proper sense, signifies a subject. I will
not

not dispute it. But it must be observed, we have only a translation of this treaty; and though we should conditionally admit the copiests to be depended on, as to the main substance and tenour of it, their expressions ought not to be strictly taken according to the letter. The association of our ideas is so extremely arbitrary, their various shades so indistinct, and languages so different and changeable, that the most able translator may long look for equivalent expressions, and find at last none but what are barely similar. The language of this treaty was antique. Polybius trusted to the Roman antiquaries; whose vanity was apt to magnify their subject. *Federati*, said they, does not directly signify allies, as of people upon an equal footing, let us render it therefore by the word subjects.

XXXII. Again, the Roman marine is ^{Their ma-} an object of no little embarrassment to the critics. Polybius himself however assures us, that the fleet of Duillius * was their first essay of this kind. Polybius therefore must be in one case or the other mistaken, since he contradicts himself; which is all the conclusion I shall draw from the matter. But even admitting the truth of his relation, the Roman history does not therefore fall to the ground. The following hypothesis affords a probable solution of this paradox; and that is as much as can be reasonably expected of an hypothesis. Tarquin oppressed both his subjects and the army. He seized, and appropriated to himself, their plunder; which gave them a disgust to military expeditions. They fitted out, therefore, small sloops, and

* Polybius, lib. i. c. 20.

went

went to cruize at sea. The infant republic protected them, but, by this treaty, laid a restraint on their depredations. The continual wars, in which it was afterwards engaged, and wherein the land forces were well paid, made this marine neglected; and, in an age or two, it was even forgotten that it had ever existed *. Polybius may have only spoken in too indistinct and general terms.

XXXIII. It may be further remarked, that this first marine of the Romans could be composed only of vessels of no more than fifty oars. Galen and Hiero constructed much larger ships †. The Greeks and

* I shall say nothing of the fleet that appeared before Tarentum; as I imagine those vessels belonged to the inhabitants of Thuricum.

See Frensheim Supplem. Livian. lib. xii. c. 8.

† Arbuthnot's Tables, p. 225. Histoire du commerce des anciens, par Huet, c. 227.

Car-

Carthaginians followed the example; and, in the first Punic war, the Romans fitted out vessels of three or four tier of oars, a circumstance that astonishes the antiquaries and mechanics to this day. So different an armament was sufficient to make them forget their former rude essays *.

XXXIV. I have with pleasure undertaken the defence of an useful and interesting history. My principal view, however, is to shew by these reflections, the nicety of critical discussions, in which, the business is not to produce demonstration, but to make a comparison between opposite probabilities; as also to shew how little confidence ought to be placed in the

Reflections on this dispute.

* The celebrated Mr. Freret has offered a different hypothesis, agreeable enough for its simplicity; but it appears to me, not quite so reasonable. See *Memoires de l'Acad. des Belles Lettres*, tom. xviii. p. 102, &c.

most

most specious and dazzling systems, since there are so few that can bear a free and attentive examination.

Criticism,
tho' practical,
not to be acquired
by rote.

XXXV. A further consideration involves criticism in a new difficulty. There are some sciences which are purely theoretical: their principles consisting only of speculative truths, and not of practical maxims. It is more easy barely to comprehend a proposition, than to render it familiar to one's thoughts, to apply it with propriety, to make use of it as a guide to our studies, or as a light to shew us the way to new discoveries.

The art of criticism is not to be acquired by rote or practice. Its elements are just, but of themselves dry and fruitless. The writer who knows these only

is equally mistaken, whether he determines to follow, or ventures to forsake them. A great genius, fertile of invention, master of critical rules, and at the same time, of the reasons on which those rules are founded, will often appear to hold them very cheap. New and enterprising in his attempts, he will seem to have thrown off their restraint: but follow him to the end, and you will always find him an admirer, tho' not an implicit one, of those rules; and that he always makes them the basis of his investigations and discoveries. Would the sciences were all *legum non hominum respublica*, such would be the wish of a learned and wise nation. The accomplishment of that wish would also constitute its felicity: but it is too well known that the happiness of a people, and the glory of those who instruct,

or

or govern them, are different, and sometimes contrary, objects. Our literary champions apply themselves only to studies resembling the spear of Achilles, adapted to the arm and strength of heroes. Shall we try a little how we can manage it?

XXXVI. A legislator in criticism has pronounced, that the Poet should ever represent his heroes such as we find them in history.

*Aut famam sequere aut sibi convenientia finge
Scriptor; Homerum * si forte reponis Achil-
len.*

*Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,
Jura neget sibi nata, nihil non arrogat ar-
mis †, &c.*

Shall we then reduce the Poet to the situation of a frigid annalist? Shall we de-

* See Bentley and Sanadon, on verse 120, of Horace's Art of Poetry.

† Hor. Ars Poet. v. 119, & seq.

prive him of that grand resource, invention, of the power of contrasting his characters, and of placing them in those critical and unexpected situations, in which we admire the hero, or tremble for the man? Or shall we not rather, attached to beauties more than rules, be more ready to pardon a writer's anachronisms than his dullness?

XXXVII. To charm, to move, to elevate the soul, are the great objects of Poetry. Its particular laws, therefore, should never make us forget they were framed to aid, and not embarrass, the efforts of genius. We have seen Philosophy so environed with demonstrations, as hardly to admit the most obvious of received opinions: these, however, are the peculiar province of Poetry. We are pleased at tak-

F

ing

ing a review of the heroes and events of antiquity : when they are travestied in the representation, we are struck with surprize; but it is a surprize that revolts against the innovation. If a writer has a mind to risque any thing new, he should reflect whether the beauties of the alteration, or novelty, be striking or trivial; whether they will compensate for that violation of the rules, which they only can justify.

The anachronisms of Ovid greatly displease us *; as truth is violated without embellishment. How different is that of

* In matters of geography and chronology no dependance is to be made on Ovid; that Poet being grossly ignorant in both these sciences. Read the description of the voyages of Medea; Metamorph. lib. vii. v. 350 to 402, and the xivth book of the same Metamorph. The one passage abounds with geographical errors, that offend even the commentators; and the other is full of chronological blunders.

Virgil,

Virgil, respecting Mezentius, who dies by the hand of Ascanius *. But what reader can be so cold and insensible, as to attend a moment to this circumstance, when he sees Æneas, the minister of divine vengeance, become the protector of oppressed nations, dart the thunder of his rage on the head of the guilty tyrant, but melt with pity over the unfortunate victim of his resentment, the youthful and pious Lausus, worthy another father and a better fate? Had the Poet been confined to historical truth, how many beauties had he not lost! Encouraged by this success, however, he wanders from it when he should have pursued it. Æneas arrives at the long-wished-for shores of Italy; the Latins run together to defend their

* Serv. ad Virg. Æneid. lib. iv. v. 620.—Dion. Halicarnass. Antiq. Rom. lib. i.

habitations, and every thing denounces a dreadful and bloody combat.

Déjà de traits en l'air s'élevoit un nuage ;
Déjà couloit le sang, premices du carnage *.

At hearing the name of Æneas, however, his enemies threw down their arms. They were afraid to encounter a warrior, whose glory took its rise from the ashes of his country. They ran, with open arms, to embrace a Prince, whose coming the oracles had foretold ; who brought with him from Asia, his gods, a race of heroes, and a promise of universal empire. Latinus offered him an asylum, and his daughter †. What a subject this for the drama ! How worthy the majesty of the Epopeia and the pen of Virgil ! Let any one, who

Racin. Iphig. act v. sc. dernier.

† Livy, lib. i. c. 1.

will

will venture, compare this with the embassy of Ilioneus, the description of the palace of Latinus, and the discourse of that Monarch *.

XXXVIII. The Poet, I say again, ^{Explanations and restrictions.} may safely venture to depart from truth, provided the reader finds in his fiction, the same pleasure which truth and consistency would give him. Not that it is permitted to subvert the annals of an age for the sake of introducing an antithesis. Nor will this rule, I am persuaded, be thought severe upon the rights of invention, if we reflect that all mankind are possessed of some degree of sensibility; but that knowledge is the portion only of a few. It is to be observed also, that beauty of sentiment operates more powerfully on the soul,

* Virg. *Æneid*. l. b. viii. v. 148.

than that of truth on the understanding. The writer, however, should always remember, that there are some liberties which must not be taken. Not even the sublime imagination of a Milton, joined to the harmonious versification of a Voltaire, could ever reconcile the reader to a cowardly Cæsar, a virtuous Cataline, or Henry the IVth subduing the Romans. In forming a just association of ideas, the characters of great men should/doubtless be held sacred; but Poets, in writing their history, may be indulged in giving it us, rather as it ought to have been, than as it actually was. Pure invention is less disgusting than essential alterations, because the latter seems to infer error, and the former only simple ignorance. It is, besides, much easier to reconcile times than places.

Great

Great indulgence ought certainly to be given to the ancients, whose chronology depended, in a great measure, on the Poets, who modelled it almost as they pleased. Whoever condemns the episode of Dido, must have more philosophy or less taste than I have *.

XXXIX.

* It may, nevertheless, be doubted, whether this episode is so irreconcilable to chronological truth as has been imagined. According to the plausible system of Sir Isaac Newton, Æneas and Dido were cotemporaries (1). The Romans certainly ought to know the History of Carthage better than the Greeks. The archives of Carthage were removed to Rome (2). The Punic language was well enough understood there (3). The Romans readily consulted the Africans concerning their origin (4). Besides, Virgil

F 4

adopts

(1) See Newton's Chronology of ancient kingdoms reformed, p. 32. (2) Universal History, vol. xviii. p. 111, 112. (3) Plaut. *Penul.* act v. sc. 1. (4) Salust. in Bell. Jugurth. c. 17. Ammian. Marcell. lib. xxii. Mem. de l'Acad. des Belles Lettres, tom. iv. p. 464.

XXXIX. The farther we advance in the sciences, the more we are convinced of

adopts a chronology more agreeable to the computations of a Newton than to those of Eratosthenes, which is of itself a sufficient disculpation. My readers will not be displeased, perhaps, to see the proofs of what is here advanced. Seven years hardly pacified the anger of Juno, and finished the wanderings of Æneas. At least so Dido informs me.

Nam te jam septima portat
Omnibus errantem terris et fluctibus ætas (5).

He arrived, some months after, in the Tiber; where the Deity of the stream appeared to him, foretold his future battles, and gave him hopes of a glorious end to his misfortunes. A prodigy confirmed the truth of the oracle. A sow, that had just littered, appeared on the banks of the river, with her thirty pigs; expressive of the number of years before the young Ascanius would lay the foundation of Alba;

Jamque tibi, ne vana putes hæc fingere somnum,
Littoreis ingens inventa sub ilicibus fus,

Triginta

(5) Virg. Æneid. lib. i. v. 755.

of their intimate connection. Their prospect resembles that of a thick and extensive
five

Triginta capitem fœtus enixa, jacebit ;
Alba, solo recubans, albi circum ubera nati.
Hic locus urbis erit, requies ea certa laborum :
Ex quo ter denis urbem redeuntibus annis
Ascanius clari condet cognominis Albam (6).

This city continued three hundred years the seat of empire, and the nursery of the Romans.

Hic jam ter centos totos regnabitur annos
Gente sub Hecorea (7).

These are the expressions Virgil has put in the mouth of Jupiter. But our chronologists give themselves no concern to make the Thunderer keep his word. They represent the city of Alba as destroyed by Tullus Hostilius almost 500 years after its foundation, and about 100 years after that of Rome (8). The system of Sir Isaac Newton, however, makes all easy. The destruction of Troy, placed in the
year

(6) Virg. *Æneid.* lib. viii. v. 42. (7) Idem lib. i. v. 272. (8) See les Tables Chronolog. d'Helvicus.

five forest. At first view, the trees, of which it is composed, appear separate and distinct;

year 904, and followed by an interval of 337 years, brings us down to 567, 60 years after the Palilia, an epoch that agrees much better with the reign of the third successor of Romulus (9). There is an ancient tradition, preserved by Plutarch (10), which exactly coincides. The books of Numa were found ann. ante Chr. 181. four hundred years after the death of that King, and the commencement of the reign of Hostilius. Numa died then 581 years before the Christian æra. How artful was it in the Poet to lay hold of the time *Æneas* arrives at Carthage, to reply to his critics, in the only manner the rapidity of his course, and the greatness of his subject would permit him! He makes it appear, that, according to his theory, this rencounter of Dido and *Æneas* is not a poetic licence. Virgil is not the only one who hath called in question the vulgar chronology of the Latin Kings. I imagine I can trace the same ideas in his contemporary Pompeius. That

histo-

(9) Newton's Chronology, p. 52, &c. (10) See Plutarch. in Numa.

distinct; but pierce the surface of the soil, and their roots are all intermixed and connected.

There

historian, the rival of Livy and Sallust (11), attributes the same period of duration, 300 years, to the kingdom of Alba. Had not his universal history been lost, we should probably have there found particular and circumstantial proofs of this opinion. As it is, we must be satisfied with the simple exposition of his abbreviator. "Albam longam condidit quæ trecentis annis caput regni fuit (12)." Livy himself, that father of Roman history, who sometimes shews so great an attachment to the vulgar chronology, but generally runs over the difficult passages in a manner that betrays his credulity and ignorance, seems to distrust his guides in those early ages (13). Nothing was more natural than for him to take notice how long those Kings reigned, whom he mentions (14). Yet is he entirely silent on this head. Nothing was more necessary than to ascertain, at least, the interval

(11) Flav. Vopisc. in proem. Aurelian. (12) Justin. lib. xliii. c. 1. (13) Tit. Liv. lib. i. c. 18. and elsewhere. (14) Livy, lib. i. c. 9.

There is no study, even the most contemptible, and least cultivated, that doth not sometimes fall upon facts, strike out lights, or raise objections closely connected with the most sublime and distant branches of science. It is pleasing to dwell on this consideration. Different people and pro-

val between *Æneas* and *Romulus*; which he has notwithstanding neglected. Nor is this all. "The destruction of *Alba*, he says, happened 400 years after it was founded (15)." In retrenching an 100 years for the reigns of *Romulus* and of *Numa*, and for the half of that of *Hortilius*, there remain just 300, instead of 400, as is given by the chronology of *Eratoſthenes*. *Livy* therefore nearly agrees with *Virgil*, the little difference between them serving rather to confirm than dissolve their agreement.—I foresee an objection, but as it is one of the most trivial, to reply to it would be only to form monsters for the sake of subduing them: I shall therefore finish this digression, already too long.

(15) *Idem*. lib. i. c. 29.

essions ought to be made acquainted with their reciprocal wants. Display to an Englishman the advantages of a Frenchman; represent to a naturalist the benefits of literature, by these means philosophy extends itself, humanity is a gainer; men heretofore rivals become brothers.

XL. In all the sciences we depend on reasonings and facts. Without the latter, the objects of our study would be chimerical; and, without the former, our most scientific acquirements would be implicit and irrational. Thus it is, the Belles-Lettres are miscellaneous: and thus every branch of natural philosophy, the study of which, under an apparent meanness, often hides its real importance, is equally so. If Physics hath its buffoons, it hath also (to speak the language of the times) its *erudits*, its pedants. The knowledge

The connection between physics and literature.

lege of antiquity presents both to the one and the other, a plentiful harvest of facts, proper to display the secrets of nature, or at least to prevent those, who make them their study, from embracing a cloud instead of a Goddess. What information may not a physician draw from the description of the plague that depopulated Athens? I can admire with him the majesty and force of Thucydides *, the art and energy of Lucretius †; but he goes farther, and learns from the miseries of the Athenians to alleviate those of his countrymen.

I know the ancients applied themselves but little to the study of nature; that

* Thucydides, lib. i.

† Lucretius, de Re Natur. lib. vii. v. 1136, &c.
desti-

destitute of instruments, and single in their experiments, they were able to collect only a small number of observations, mixed with uncertainty, diminished by the injuries of time, and scattered up and down at random, thro' a number of volumes *: But should their scarcity induce us to neglect them? The activity of the human mind is usually increased by difficulties; and strange would it be if relaxation and negligence should be the offspring of necessity.

XLI. The most zealous advocates for the moderns, I think, don't deny the su-
The advantages of the ancients.

* M. Freret thinks the philosophical observations of the ancients more exact than is commonly imagined. Those, who are acquainted with this author's arguments and talents, will know the weight of his authority. See *Mem. de l'Acad. des Belles-Lettres*, tom. xviii. p. 97.

The representations on their amphitheatre.

perior advantages which the ancients in some respects possessed. I shudder at the recollection of the bloody spectacles of the Romans; those savage combats of wild beasts, which Cicero so much despised and detested *. Solitude and silence were by him preferred to these master-pieces of magnificence, horror, and wretchedness of taste †. In fact, to take delight in blood-shed is only worthy an herd of savages.

* Cicero envies the happiness of his friend Marius, who spent his time in the country during the magnificent diversions of Pompey. He speaks with sufficient contempt of the other representations; but particularly of the combats of wild beasts. “ Reliquiæ sunt venationes, (says he) binæ per dies quinque; magnifice, nemo negat, sed quæ potest homini esse politico delectatio, cum aut homo imbecillus à valentissimâ bestia laniatur aut præclara bestia venabulo transverberatur.”

† Cicero ad Familias, lib. vii. epist. i.

The

The construction of palaces, in which to exhibit the combats of wild beasts, could be thought of only among a people, who preferred the decorations and machinery of a theatre, to the finest verses and the most exquisite beauties of the drama *. But such were the Romans: their virtues, their vices, and even their most ridiculous amusements were connected with their ruling passion, the love of their country.

Those spectacles, nevertheless, so shocking in the eye of the Philosopher, so frivolous in that of a man of taste, ought to be valued by the naturalist. Let us imagine the whole world ransacked to furnish subjects for these diversions; the treasures of the Rich, the influence of the Great,

* Horat. lib. ii. epist. i. v. 187.

all employed to find out creatures remarkable for their figure, strength, or rarity; to bring them into the amphitheatre at Rome, and there to make a display of the whole animal *. This must certainly be an admirable school, particularly for the study of that noblest branch of natural history, which applies itself rather to the nature and properties of animals, than to the minute description of their bones and muscles. We must not forget that Pliny frequented this school, nor that ignorance hath two daughters, incredulity and implicit faith. Let us be equally cautious to defend ourselves against the one and the other.

The countries in which the ancient

XLII. If we leave this theatre to enter on a more extensive one, and enquire what

* See *Essais de Mont.* vol. iii. p. 140.

countries were open to the researches of physicians
 the ancient naturalists, we shall find they studied
 nature.
 had in this respect no reason to complain.

Navigation, indeed, hath since discovered to us another hemisphere; but the discoveries of the seaman, and the voyages of the merchant, do not always improve the world so much as they enrich it. The limits of the known world are more confined than the material one, while those of the enlightened world are still more narrow and contracted. From the times of its Plinys and Ptolemys, Europe has been, as at this day, the seat of the sciences: but Greece, Asia, Syria, Ægypt, Africa, countries fruitful in the wonders of nature, then abounded with Philosophers worthy to regard them. All that vast body of men were united by peace, by the laws, and by a common language. The

African and the Briton, the Spaniard and the Arabian, met together at the capital, and mutually instructed each other. Thirty persons of the first rank in Rome, often men of science themselves, but always accompanied by such as were *, set out every year from that metropolis, to govern the several provinces; and, if they had any curiosity at all, authority was always at hand, to facilitate the operations of science.

Of the inundation of Great Britain by the sea.

XLIII. It was, doubtless, from his father-in-law Agricola, that Tacitus learnt that the sea, overflowing the island of Britain, had rendered it a country of bogs and marshes †. Herodian confirms the fact ‡. And yet at present, the land of

* Strabo, lib. xvii. p. 816. Edit. Casaub.

† Tacit. in Vit. Agricol. c. 10.

‡ Herod. Hist. lib. iii. c. 47.

this island, except in some few places, is sufficiently high and dry *. May not we place this circumstance among those, which serve to confirm the system of the diminution of fluids? Or is it in the power of art to deliver the land from its subjection to the sea? The situation of the morafs of Pomptina † and some others, gives us but indifferent

* These are the words of Herodian. “Τὰ γὰρ πλῆτα τῆς βρετανῶν χώρας ἐπικλύζομενα ταῖς τῆ ὤκειαν συνήχως ἀμπατισιν ἰλῶδη γίνεται.”

Tacitus expresses himself in a manner still stronger. “Unum addiderim (says he) nusquam latius dominari mare; multum fluminum huc atque illuc ferri, nec littore tenus accrescere aut reforberi, sed influere penitus atque ambire; etiam jugis atque montibus influere velut in suo.”

† Céthegus, the consul, drained this morafs. A. U. C. 592. In the time of Julius Cæsar, however, it was again overflowed. This dictator had a design

indifferent ideas of that of the ancients in this particular. Be this as it will, content with having furnished the materials, I leave the use of them to the naturalists. It is not from the ancients that we learn to skim the superficies of things, to examine nothing to the bottom, and to speak with most confidence on those subjects we understand the least.

Of a genius for
Philosophy.

XLIV. " Next to the talent of discernment, the rarest thing in the world,

of setting people to work at it. It appears Augustus did so. But I doubt if his endeavours succeeded any better than the former. At least Pliny calls it still a morass. Horace had indeed in a manner foretold it.

" Debemur morti nos nostraque

" Sterilis ut palus dudum aptaque remis

" Vicinas urbes alit et grave sensit aratrum."

Frensheim suppl. lib. xlv. c. 44. Sueton. lib. i. c. 44. Plin. hist. nat. lib. iii. c. 5.

(says

(says the judicious Bruyere) " we may
 " prize pearls and diamonds." I will
 not scruple to place the talent for philoso-
 phizing above that of discernment. There ^{Preten-}
 is nothing in the world more talked of, ^{sions to}
 less known, or more rare. There is not ^{this ta-}
 a writer of them all who does not aspire ^{lent.}
 to it, or would not readily give up his pre-
 tensions to science to make good his claim
 to this. Press him ever so little, and he
 will admit that a nice Judgment must
 embarrass the operations of genius: but
 he will, notwithstanding, constantly assure
 you, that the philosophical spirit, which
 breathes throughout his writings, is cha-
 racteristical of the present age. The phi-
 losophical turn and talents of a few great
 men, have, according to him, formed the
 genius of the age. This influence has ex-
 tended itself over all the different ranks

in the state, and has trained up scholars worthy of such eminent masters.

What it is
not.

XLV. If we take a survey, however, of the works of our Philosophers, their diversity will leave us in great doubt concerning the nature of this talent; and this may not unreasonably lead us to doubt also, whether it has fallen to their lot. With some it consists in a humour for striking out into some new path, and for exploding every established opinion, whether that of a Socrates, or a Spanish inquisitor, for no other reason than because it is established. With others again, it is the same thing as a talent for Geometry, that haughty and imperious science, which, not content with absolute sovereignty itself, hath proscribed its sister sciences, and pronounces all reasoning unworthy that name, whose object is not confined to lines and figures.

figures. Let us do justice, however, to that enterprizing spirit, whose errors have sometimes led the way to truth, and whose very extravagancies, like the rebellion of a people, have inspired a salutary indignation against arbitrary power. Let us acknowledge every thing we owe to the mathematics: but let us at present attend to the genius of philosophy, an object more judicious than the former, and less confined than the latter.

XLVI. Those who are intimately acquainted with the writings of Cicero, Tacitus, Bacon, Leibnitz, Bayle, Fontenelle, and Montesquieu, will be able to form a more just and adequate idea of this talent than what I shall attempt to describe. ^{What it is.}

A philosophical genius consists in the capacity of recurring to the most simple ideas;

ideas; in discovering and combining the first principles of things. The possessor of this distinguishing faculty has a view as piercing as extensive. Situated on an eminence, he takes in a wide extensive field, of which he forms a precise and exact idea; while a genius of an inferior cast, tho' what he sees he distinguishes with equal precision, is more contracted in his views, and discovers only a part of the whole. A philosopher may be a mathematician, a musician, an antiquary; but in every thing he is still the philosopher; and, in consequence of his abilities, to comprehend the first principles of his art, he rises superior to every other artist. Placed among that small number of geniuses, formed for so arduous a task, he labours to complete that elementary science, to which, if once brought to perfection, every other must submit. Taken in this sense, a philosophical

phical genius is very uncommon. There are many men capable of forming particular ideas with precision ; but there are few who can comprehend, in one abstract idea, a numerous association of others, less general.

XLVII. Will it be asked, What study can form such a genius ? I know of none. It is the gift of heaven, which the greater part of mankind are ignorant of, or despise ; it is the wish of the wise ; some have received, but not one has acquired, it : I conceive, however, that the Study of Literature, the habit of becoming by turns, a Greek, a Roman, the disciple of Zeno and of Epicurus, is extremely proper to exercise its powers and display its merit. It is remarkable, that, throughout that infinite diversity of geniuses, there is a general conformity of sentiment between those

The assistance it may gain from literature.

those whom their age, country and religion have led to take a view of the same objects, in nearly the same manner. We see that minds, the most exempt from prejudice, cannot altogether shake it off. Their ideas have an air of paradox; and we perceive even by their broken chains, that they have worn them. It is among the Greeks that I look for the abettors of democracy; among the Romans, the enthusiasts to the love of their country; among the subjects of Commodus, Severus and Caracalla, for the apologists for arbitrary power; and among the ancient followers of Epicurus, the enemies of the religion of their country *. What a retro-

* Epicurus had no sooner published his doctrines, than some people expressed themselves freely on the established religion, and began to regard it only as a political institution. Lucret. de Rer. Nat. lib. i. v. 62. Sallust. in Bell. Catilin. c. 51. Cicero pro Cluent. c. 61.

spect is it to a genius truly philosophical, to see the most absurd opinions received among the most enlightened people; to see barbarians, on the other hand, arrive at the knowledge of the most sublime truths; to find true consequences falsely deduced from the most erroneous principles; admirable principles, bordering on the verge of truth, without ever conducting thither; languages formed on ideas, and yet those ideas corrected by such languages; the springs of morality universally the same; the opinions of contentious metaphysics universally varied, and generally extravagant, accurate only while superficial, but subtle, obscure and uncertain whenever they were profound! A philosophical work written by an Iroquois, tho' full of absurdities, would be to us an inestimable performance. It would present us with a singular instance of the nature of the human

man

man mind, placed in circumstances we have never experienced, and influenced by customs and religious opinions totally different from ours. Sometimes it would surprize and instruct us, by the contrariety of ideas, that would thence necessarily arise ; we should be led to enquire into the reasons, and trace the mind from errour to errour : Sometimes, again, we should see our own principles, but deduced by different means, and almost always peculiarly modified and altered. We should hence learn, not only to acknowlege, but to feel the force of prejudice ; we should learn never to be surprized at apparent absurdity, and often to suspect the truth of what might appear to want no confirmation.

I must own, I like to see the reasonings of mankind take a tincture from their prejudices ;

judices; to take a view of such as are afraid to deduce, even from principles they acknowlege to be just, conclusions which they know to be logically exact. I like to detect those who detest in a barbarian what they admire in a Greek, and who would call the same history impious if written by an heathen, and sacred if penned by a Jew.)

Without a philosophical knowlege of antiquity, we should be induced to do too much honour to humankind. The influence of custom would be little known. We should every moment be apt to confound the incredible and the absurd. The Romans were an enlightened people; and yet these very Romans were not shocked at seeing united, in the person of Cæsar, a
God,

God, a priest, and an atheist *. He saw temples erected, to his clemency †, and received, with Romulus, the adoration of the people ‡. In the sacred festivals, his statue was placed by the side of that Jupiter, whom the next instant he himself was going to invoke §. After all which, tired

* If not in denying the existence, at least in disbelieving the providence, of the Deity; for Cæsar was a follower of Epicurus. Those who have a mind to see how obscure a man of abilities may render the clearest truths, will peruse with pleasure the doubts with which Mr. Bayle has perplexed the sentiments of Cæsar. See Bayle's Dict. Art. CÆSAR.

† Mem. de l'Acad. des Bell. Lett. tom. i. p. 369, &c.

‡ Cicero ad Attic. lib. xii. epist. 46, &c. lib. xiii. epist. 28.

§ Cæsar was sovereign Pontiff; nor was this sacerdotal office merely titular. The elegant dissertations

tired with such idle pomp, he used to send for Panfa and Trebatius, to laugh with him at the credulity of the vulgar, and at those deities which were the effect and objects of their fear *.

XLVIII.

tions of Mr. de la Bastie on the pontificate of the Emperours, will convince those who are incredulous on this head. Consult particularly the third of those pieces, inserted in the *Memoires de l'Acad. des Bell. Lett.* tom. xv. p. 39.

* Lucretius, born with that enthusiasm of imagination, which forms great Poets and enterprising missionaries, was desirous of being both the one and the other. I must pity the theologue, however, who cannot grant some indulgence to the latter, for the sake of the former. This philosopher, after having proved a Divinity in spite of himself, by attributing the phenomena of nature to general causes, proceeds to enquire, how the notion he controverts came to be so universally entertained. For this he discovers three reasons: I. Our dreams; for in these we conceive beings and effects that we never meet with in the material world, and attribute to

H

them

History is
the sci-
ence of
causes
and ef-
fects.

XLVIII. History is, to a philosophi-
cal genius, what play was to the Marquis

them a real existence and immense power. II. Our ignorance of the works of nature, which makes us, on every occasion, recur to the hand of a Divinity. III. Our fear, which is the effect of that ignorance: this induces us to submit to the calamities which happen to the earth, and excites us to endeavour to appease, by our prayers, some invisible being that is supposed to afflict us. Lucretius expresses this last motive with an energy and a rapidity of style which bears all before it, and will not give the reader time to examine its validity.

“ Præterea cui non animus formidine Divûm,

“ Contrahitur? cui non conrepunt membra pavore,

“ Fulminis horribili cum plaga torrida tellus

“ Contremittit, et magnum percurrunt murmura celum?

“ Non populi, gentesque tremunt? Regesque su-

“ perbi

“ Conripiunt Divûm perculsi membra timore,

“ Ne quod ob admissum sæde dictumve superbe

“ Pænarum grave sit solvendi tempus adaestum.”

Lucret. de Re. Nat. lib. v. ver. 1216, &c.

Dan.

Dangeau *. He saw a system, regularity and connection, where others only perceived the wanton caprices of chance. The knowledge of history is to the philosopher that of causes and effects. It deserves, therefore, that I should endeavour to lay down some rules, not to enable genius to proceed, but to prevent its wandering from the right path. Perhaps, if things had been always duly considered, subtlety had not been so often mistaken for ingenuity, obscurity for profundity, or a turn for paradox been misconceived to be the index of a creative genius.

XLIX. Among a multitude of historical facts, there are some, and those by much the majority, which prove nothing more than that they are facts. There are others which may be useful in drawing a

Rules for
the choice
of facts.

* Fontenelle dans l'Eloge du Marq. de Dangeau.

partial conclusion, whereby the philosopher may be enabled to judge of the motives of an action, or some peculiar features in a character: these relate only to single links of the chain. Those whose influence extends throughout the whole system, and which are so intimately connected as to have given motion to the springs of action, are very rare; and what is still more rarely to be met with is, a genius who knows how to distinguish them, amidst the vast chaos of events wherein they are jumbled, and deduce them, pure and unmixed, from the rest.

It will appear unnecessary to observe to those, whose judgment is superiour to their erudition, that causes ought always to be proportioned to their effects; that it is wrong to trace the character of an age, from

from the conduct of an individual ; or to estimate from a single effort, often forced and destructive, the strength and riches of a state. It will be needless to put such in mind, that, it is only by collecting and comparing facts any judgment is to be deduced from them ; that a signal action may sometimes dazzle like a flash of lightening, but that we shall be able to gather little from it, unless we compare it with others of the same kind. The Romans, in making choice of Cato, shewed they liked better to be corrected than flattered * ; and this they did in the same age in which they condemned the like manly severity in the person of Livius Salinator †.

L. It is safer to yield to facts, than to ^{Trivial} ^{facts, of} ^{consequence.} themselves unite to form a system, than to

* Liv. lib. xxxix. c. 40. Plut. in Cato.

† Liv. lib. xxix. c. 37.

such as one may discover in consequence of a pre-conceived hypothesis. Slight circumstances are also often more worthy notice than the most brilliant actions ; it being exactly the same thing with an age, or a nation, as with the individual. Alexander displays his character more in the tent of Darius * than in the field of battle. I discover as much the ferocity of the Roman people in their condemnation of an unhappy criminal, to be torn to pieces in the amphitheatre, as in their strangling a captive King before the capitol. There is no preparatory disguise to trivial actions. We undress only when we imagine we are not seen ; but the curious will endeavour to penetrate the most secret retirement. Should I undertake to determine, whether virtue

* Quintus Curtius de Reb. Gest. Alexandri, lib. iii.
c. 37.

prevailed

prevailed in the character of a certain age, or people, I should examine into their actions rather than their discourse. In order to condemn them as vicious, I should attend rather to their words than their actions. The difference between virtue and vice. Virtue is praised without being known; known without being felt; and felt without being practised; but the case is different with vice. We are led to vice by our passions, and defend it by subtlety of reasoning. There are besides bad men in all ages and countries: but, if the depravation be not too general, even these will shew some respect to the times. If the age itself is vicious, (and they are apt enough to discern this) they hold it in contempt, shew themselves openly what they are, and laugh at penalties, which they flatter themselves will fall but lightly. In this also they are never deceived. The

man who, in the time of Cato, had detested vice, would have contented himself with the simple admiration of virtue in that of Tiberius.

The age
of Tiberi-
us the
most vici-
ous of an-
tiquity.

LI. I have made choice of this age with design. Vice had then arrived at its highest pitch. This I learn from the court of Tiberius itself; but there is a small circumstance related by Suetonius and Tacitus, which gives me a still greater assurance of it. It is this. The virtue of the Romans punished the inconstancy of their wives with death *. Their policy permitted

* The Romans entrusted the fidelity of their wives to the care and determination of their family. The relations met, if any one was accused, judged, condemned to death, and executed their own sentence on the criminal. The laws also pardoned the husband or father, who, in the transport of his passion, killed

mitted the debaucheries of their courtezans *; and, in order even to regulate their

killed the gallant, particularly if of a servile rank. See Plut. in Rom.—Dionys. Halicarn. lib. vii.—Tac. Ann. lib. xiii.—Valer. Max. lib. vi. c. 3—7. Rosin. Antiq. Roma. lib. viii. p. 859, &c.

* The discourse of Micio in Terence, the manner in which Cicero excuses the debaucheries of his client, and the exhortation of Cato sufficiently explain the morals of the Romans in this respect. They censured debauchery only so far as it prevented the discharge of the essential duties of the citizen.

Nor were their ears more chaste than their actions. The *Casina* of Plautus is little known; but those who have read that miserable piece, can hardly comprehend how it is possible that there should be but forty or fifty years between that farce and the *Andria*. It consists of a vile intrigue between a parcel of slaves, heightened only by smutty jests and obscenities, low as their condition. None of Plautus's comedies, however, were played so often, nor received with so much applause, as this wretched performance. Such were the Roman manners at the time of the second Punic

their irregularities, formed them into a licensed body. Now it appears, that under Tiberius, a great number of women of distinction did not blush to make public application to the Ediles, to get themselves enrolled among the number of privileged curtezans; and thus, tho' to their own infamy, broke thro' that barrier which the laws opposed to their prostitution *.

A parallel
between
Tacitus
and Livy.

LII. To select those facts, which ought to form the principles of our reasonings, is a task whose extreme difficulty is easy to be perceived. The negligence or bad

Punic war: such that virtue which the posterity of ancient Rome so much regretted and admired. See Terent. Adelph. Act i. sc. 2.—Cicero pro Cælio, c. 17.—Hor. Sat. lib. i. Sat. 2. v. 29. Prolog. ad Casin. Plaut.

* Sueton. lib. iii. c. 35.—Tacit. Annal. lib. ii. c. 85.

taste

taste of an historian may probably have occasioned us to lose for ever a choice circumstance, for the sake of stunning our ears with the noise of a battle. If philosophers are not always historians, it were at least to be wished that all historians were philosophers.

Tacitus is the only writer I know that comes up to my idea of such a philosophical historian. Even the interesting Livy himself cannot, in this sense, be compared to him. Both indeed have soared far above those ignorant compilers, who see nothing in facts but the circumstances of which they are composed: but the one has written history as a rhetorician, and the other as a philosopher. Not that either Tacitus was ignorant of the language of the passions, or Livy in that of reason; but

but the latter, more earnest to please than instruct, conducts us step by step in the retinue of his heroes, and makes us alternately experience the effects of horror, pity, and admiration. Tacitus employs the force of rhetoric only to display the connection between the links that form the chain of historical events, and to instruct the reader by sensible and profound reflections. It is true, I climb the Alps with Hannibal; but I deliberate in the council of Tiberius. Livy describes to me the abuse of power; a severity that nature shudders at while it approves; the spirit of resentment and patriotism, which constitute that of liberty, and the tyranny which fell before their united efforts *: but the laws of the decemvir, their character, their failings, their conformity to

* Livy, lib. iii. c. 44.—60.

the genius of the Roman people, to their own party, to their ambitious designs; all these he has entirely forgotten. I do not find it accounted for in him, why the laws, made for the use of a small, poor, and half-civilized republic, should overturn it when the force of their institution had carried it to the highest pitch of greatness. This I should have found in Tacitus; I think so, not only from the known bent of his genius, but from that striking and diversified picture he has given of the laws, those children of corruption, of liberty, of equity, and of faction*.

LIII. An eminent writer, who, like Fontenelle, has united erudition and taste, gives us a piece of advice, which I would by no means have followed. At the close

Remarks
on an ob-
servation
of Mr.
d'Alem-
bert.

* Tacit. Annal. lib. iii. p. 84. edit. Lips.

of every century he would have the facts collected, a choice made of a few, and the rest committed to the flames *. I enter my protest, however, without fear of incurring the contemptible name of a mere scholar, against the sentence of this enlightened, but severe judge. No, let us carefully preserve every historical fact. A Montesquieu may discover, in the most trivial, connections unknown to the vulgar. Let us in this imitate the botanists. Every plant is not useful in medicine; they proceed, nevertheless, in their search after new ones, in hopes that some happy genius or experiment may discover properties in them hitherto concealed.

Mankind are either too systematical or too capricious. LIV. Uncertainty is a state of constraint. A contracted mind cannot fix it.

* D'Alembert *Melanges de Philosophie et de Littérature*, vol. ii. p. 1.

self

self in that exact equilibrium affected by the school of Pirrho. A bright genius is often dazzled by its own conjecture; and sacrifices its liberty to hypotheses. It is this disposition that is productive of systems. Design has been often observed to govern the actions of a great man; a ruling principle has been perceived in his character; hence theoretical minds have conceived the notion, that mankind in general are as systematical in practice as in speculation. They have pretended to discover art in our passions, policy in our foibles, dissimulation in our caprices; in a word, by their endeavours to enhance the merit of the understanding, they have done little honour to the heart.

Justly disgusted at such excessive refinement, and displeased to see those pretensions extended to mankind in general which

should be confined to a Philip or a Cæsar, others of a more natural turn have run into the other extreme. These have entirely banished art from the moral world, in order to substitute accident in its room. According to them, weak mortals act altogether from caprice: the phrenzy of a madman raises up the pillars of an empire, and the weakness of a woman throws them down:

Of general and determinate causes.

LV. The study of general and determinate causes should be agreeable to both parties; as in this the one would, with pleasure, see the pride of man humbled; the motives of his actions unknown to himself; a puppet moved by foreign wires; and from particular liberty would see the origin of general necessity. The others also, would find in the study of general causes, that connection they so much admire.

mire, and ample room for indulging these speculations for which their genius is turned.

What a wide field opens itself to my reflection! The theory of general causes would, in the hands of a Montesquieu, become a philosophical history of man. He would display these causes operating in the rise and fall of empires; successively assuming the appearance of accident, of prudence, of courage, and of cowardice; acting without the concurrence of particular causes, and sometimes directly against them. Superior to a fondness for his own systems, that meanest passion in a philosopher, he would discover that, notwithstanding the extensive influence of those causes, its effect must necessarily be confined, and that it would principally display itself in general events; in such whose

I

flow,

flow, but certain, operation works imperceptibly a change on the face of things, particularly on religion, on manners, and indeed every thing that depends on opinion. Such would in part be the lesson such a philosopher would give on the subject. As to myself, I only lay hold of it as an occasion just to exercise my thoughts. To this end, I shall point out some interesting facts, and endeavour to account for them.

The system of Paganism.

LVI. We are not ignorant of the pleasant and absurd system of Paganism, according to which the universe is peopled with whimsical beings, whose superior power only serves to make them more unjust and ridiculous than ourselves. What could be the nature and origin of these Deities? Were they Princes, founders of societies, or inventors of the arts? Did ingenious

genuous gratitude, implicit admiration, or an interested homage place those great men in heaven when dead, who, while they lived, were esteemed as the benefactors of mankind on earth? Or may we not discover in those Divinities, so many different parts of the universe, to whom the ignorance of primitive ages attributed life and sentiment? This question is worth our attention; and, curious as it is, is no less difficult to resolve.

LVI. We have no other method of coming at the knowlege of the heathen system, than by means of their Poets * and Priests, both greatly addicted to fiction †. The enemies of a religion never

The difficulty of coming to the knowlege of a religion.

* We must, however, distinguish Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, and the tragic Poets, who lived in an age when their tradition was more pure.

† See on this article, Dr. Middleton's Free Enquiry, and the History of Manichism, by M. de Beaufobre.

arrive at a just knowledge of it, because they hate it; and often hate it for that very reason, because they are ignorant of it. They eagerly adopt the most atrocious calumnies thrown out against it. They impute to their adversaries even dogmas they detest, and draw consequences which the accused never once thought of. On the other hand, the professors of a religion, full of that implicit faith, which makes a crime of doubt, often sacrifice both their reason and virtue in its defence. To invent prophecies and miracles, to palliate those they cannot defend, to allegorize those they cannot palliate, and to deny stoutly those they cannot allegorize, are means which devotees have never blushed to employ. Call to mind the Christians and the Jews; and see what their enemies the magicians and idolaters * have had to say

* Tacit. Hist. lib. v.—Fleury Hist. Eccles. tom. i. p. 369. tom. ii. p. 5. with the Apologies of Justin and Tertullian, which are there cited.

against

against them, against those whose worship was as pure, as their manners irreproachable. Never was there a true Mussulman who hesitated about the unity of God*; and yet how often have our good ancestors accused the Mahometans of worshipping the stars †? Nay, even in the centre of these religions, have started up an hundred different sectaries, who, accusing each other of having corrupted the common articles of their faith, have excited the mob to zeal and fury, and the discerning few to moderation. These were, notwithstanding, a civilized people, and had books which, acknowledged to be written by the inspiration of Divinity, settled the principles of their faith. But how were these principles to

* D'Herbelot, Bibliot. Orient. artic. Allah. p. 100.
et Sales's Alcoran. Prelim. Disc. p. 71.

† Reland de Rel. Mahomm. part ii. c. 6. & 7.

be discovered, amidst a confused heap of fables, which a single, contradictory and diversified tradition had taught a few clans of savages in Greece.

Reason of
little use.

LVII. Reason is here of little use. It is absurd to consecrate temples to those whose tombs are before our eyes. But what is too absurd for mankind? Don't we know that there are very enlightened people who appeal to the evidence of sense as a proof of the truth of their religion, while at the same time one of their principal dogmas is directly contradictory to that evidence? If the gods of Paganism, however, had been men, the reciprocal homage * their worshippers had paid them had been something reasonable; and a to-

* Warburton's Divine Legation, vol. i. p. 270—
276.

leration

eration something reasonable is not generally the fault of the multitude.

LVIII. ^{Cresus} ^{sent to} ^{consult the} ^{oracle at} ^{Delphos.} Cresus sent to consult the oracle at Delphos *, and Alexander traversed the burning sands of Lybia, to know of Jupiter Ammon if he was not his son †. But had this Grecian Jupiter, this King of Crete, become possessed of the thunder, would he not have let it loose to crush that Ammon, that Lybian, that new Salmo-neus, who endeavoured to wrest it from him? If two rivals dispute the empire of the world, is it possible to acknowledge both at once? If indeed they were no otherwise distinguished than as the æther, and the heavens, the same Divinity, the Greek and the African might describe it by these

* Herodotus, lib. i.

† Diodorus Siculus, lib. xvii.—Quint. Curt. lib. iv. c. 7.—Arrian, lib. iii.

symbols, which their manners, and by those terms which their different languages should furnish them with to express its attributes. But we have nothing to do with speculative argumentation; we are to enquire only of facts.

The religion of the Greeks was of Ægyptian origin.

LIX. The Greeks, but wretched inhabitants of the forest, proud as they were, were obliged for every thing to strangers. The Phenicians taught them the use of letters; for their arts, for their laws, for every thing that raises man above the brute, they were indebted to the Ægyptians. The latter brought over their religion, and the Greeks, in adopting it, paid that tribute which ignorance owes to wisdom. Their ancient prejudices made only a formal resistance, and gave up the point without difficulty, after hearing the sense of the oracle of Dodona, who determined in favour

your of the new religion *. Such is the relation of Herodotus, who was well acquainted both with Greece and Ægypt, while the age in which he lived, being that interval between the grossness of ignorance and the refinements of philosophy, renders his testimony decisive.

LX. I see already a great part of the Greek legends fall to the ground ; of their Apollo, born in the island of Delos ; and their Jupiter, buried in Crete. If these deities were ever upon earth, Ægypt, and not Greece, was their habitation. But if the priests of Memphis understood their religion so well as the Abbé Bannier †, not Ægypt itself gave birth to their gods. The light of reason shone too clearly thro' the obscurity of their metaphysics, not to

The Ægyptian religion allegorical.

* Herod. lib. ii.

† In his Mythology explained by history.

enable

enable them to perceive that human beings could never become gods, and that the gods never transformed themselves into mere men *. Myfterious in their tenets as in their worship, thefe interpreters of wifdom and the divinity difguifed by a pompous ftile, the truths of nature, which an ignorant people had defpifed, if delivered to them in their genuine majestic fimplicity. The Greeks were ignorant of this religion in many refpects. They altered it by the introduction of foreign mixtures, but the ground-work remained ftill the fame ; and that, being Ægyptian, was confequently allegorical †.

LXI.

* Herodot. lib. ii.

† I am much indebted, in thefe enquiries, to the learned Freret, of the Academy of Belles-Lettres. He has opened a route, which appears obvious from all fides. I conceive, however, that he reafons much better

LXI. The worship of heroes, so well distinguished from that of the gods, in the primitive ages of Greece, proves that ~~their~~ gods were not heroes *. The ancients believed, that these great men, admitted after their decease to the feasts of the gods,

Of the
worship of
heroes.

better on facts than dogmas. Prejudiced greatly in his favour, I eagerly ran over his Reply to the Chronology of Sir Isaac Newton ; but, may I venture to say, it by no means answered my expectations. I see nothing new in that piece, if we except the principles of a new theology and chronology, which, however, we already possessed (1); some defective and inconclusive genealogy ; a few minute researches into the chronology of Sparta, an ancient system of astronomy, which I do not well understand, and the elegant preface of M. de Bougainville, which indeed I peruse every time with additional pleasure.

* Hist. de l'Acad. des Belles-Lettres, tom. xvi. p. 28, &c.

(1) In the Mem. de l'Acad. des Belles Lettres, tom. v. xviii. xx. xxiii.

enjoyed

enjoyed their felicity without participating of their power. Hence they assembled about the tombs of their benefactors; celebrated their memory in songs of praise*, and this excited a salutary emulation of their virtue; while they imagined the ghosts of the dead, conjured up from the shades, took pleasure in these offerings of their devotion. It is true, that this species of devotion became insensibly a religious worship; but it was not till long after, when the identity of these heroes became confused with that of the ancient deities, whose name they bore, or whose characters they resembled. They were considered as distinct in the days of Homer. Hercules is not one of his divinities. He acknowledges Æsculapius only as an emi-

* Mem. de Litter. tom. xii. p. 5, &c. et Zech. Spanheim in Callim.

nent physician * ; and Castor and Pollux are with him two deceased warriors, buried at Sparta †.

LXII. Superstition, however, had ex-
ceeded these bounds ; the heroes were be-
come gods, and the worship paid to them
as deities had elevated them above the
rank of men, when an enterprising philo-
sopher undertook to prove they had been
mortals. Ephemerus, the Messenian, ad-
vanced this paradoxical opinion ‡. But,
instead

The sys-
tem of
Epheme-
rus.

* Homer. Iliad. lib. iv. v. 193.

† Id. lib. v. v. 241.

‡ Lactant. Instit. lib. i. c. 11. p. 62.

Antiquus auctor Ephemerus, qui fuit é civitate
Messanâ, res gestas Jovis et cæterorum qui Dii pu-
tantur collegit, historiamque contexuit ex titulis et in-
scriptionibus sacris, quæ antiquissimis templis habe-
bantur, maximeque in fano Jovis Triphyllii, ubi
auream columnam positam esse ab ipso Jove, titu-
lus

instead of appealing to the authentic monuments of Greece and Ægypt, which might have preserved the memory of those celebrated men, he launched forth and lost himself in the ocean. An Utopia, held in derision by the ancients, the rich, the fertile, superstitious isle of Panchia, known to himself only, furnished him with a magnificent temple consecrated to Jupiter, in which was a column of gold, whereon Mercury had engraven the exploits and apotheosis of the heroes of his race *. These fables

lus indicabat, in quâ columnâ gesta sua perscripsit ut monumentum esset posteris rerum suarum.

This relation of Lactantius differs a little from that of Diodorus.

* Diodorus Siculus, lib. v. p. 29, 30. et lib. vi.

Mr. Fourmont, the elder, hath written a dissertation on Ephemerus, wherein are some very bold conjectures

fables were too gross to pass on the Greeks themselves, bringing the author into general contempt, and getting him stigmatized by the name of atheist *.

jections and pleasant extravagancies (1). It ill becomes a young writer to hold others in contempt; but I really cannot reply seriously to that piece. Those who cannot see that the Panchaia described in Diodorus Siculus, is situated to the south of Gidrosia, and at a little distance westward of the peninsula of India, may believe, with Mr. Fourmont, that the gulph is south of Arabia Felix, that Phank, on the continent, is the isle of Panchaia, that the desert of Pharan is the most delightful place in the world, and that the city of Pieria in Syria is the capital of a little district in the neighbourhood of Medina.

* Callim. ap. Plut. tom. ii. p. 880. Eratosth. et Polyb. ap. Strab. Geog. lib. ii. p. 102, 103. et lib. vii. p. 299. Edit. Caufab.

(1) Mem. de Litter. tom. xv. p. 265, &c.

LXIII.

LXIII. Encouraged, perhaps, by his example, the Cretans next boasted of their being in possession of the tomb of Jupiter, who, after having reigned * many years, died in their island. Callimachus appears angry at this fiction, and his scholiast shews on what foundation it was raised †. The following words, says he, had been inscribed on a tomb. *The tomb of Minos the son of Jupiter.* But accident or design having erased the words *Minos the son*, it stood thus *The tomb of Jupiter* ‡. The system

* Lactant. Instit. lib. i. c. 11. p. 65.—Lucian Timod, p. 34. et Jupit. Frag. p. 701.—Cicero de Nat. Deorum, lib. iii. c. 21.

† Callimach. Hym. in Jovem, v. 8. et Scholiast. Vet. in loc. Edit. Græc.

‡ Such is the story of the scholiast, adopted by Sir Isaac Newton. But Lactantius writes the inscription

The system of Ephemerus, however, notwithstanding the insufficiency of his proofs, by degrees gained ground. Diodorus Siculus searched the world over for traditions of different people to support it *. But the Stoics, in their whimsical mixture of pure Theism, Spinozism and popular idolatry, adopted this paganism, for which they were sticklers, to the worship of nature, divided into as many deities as it had different faces. Cicero, whom every thing served for an objection, hardly any thing

scription ΖΑΝ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ, which gives it, in my opinion, a more antique air. Lucian, for fables go on always gathering something, tells us, that the inscription intimated, that Jupiter no longer thundered, but had submitted to the fate of mortals, *δηλασάν ὡς μετὶ βροτῆσιν αὖν ὁ Ζεὺς, τελευτῶς παλαι.*

* Diodorus Siculus, in his first five books.

for a proof, hardly durst confront them with the system of Ephemerus*.

Did not
prevail till
the time
of the Em-
perours.

LXIV. It was not till the time of the Emperours, that this system grew into vogue. In an age, when a servile world bestowed the title of gods on monsters, unworthy the name of men, it was artfully paying their court to confound the distinctions between Jupiter and Domitian. Benefactors to mankind (for so the voice of adulation called them) their right to divinity the same; their nature and their power were equal. Pliny himself, either thro' policy or contempt, commits the same error †. It was in vain Plutarch attempted to vindicate the religion of his

* Cicero de Natura Deorum, lib. iii. c. 21.

† Plin. Hist. Nat. lib. vii. c. 51. et passim.

ancestors.

ancestors *. Ephemerus carried all before him; and the fathers of the church, taking all advantages, attacked paganism on its weakest side. And who can blame them? Say, those pretended divinities were not in fact originally deified mortals, they were now become so, at least in the opinion of their worshippers; and their opinions were all the fathers troubled themselves about.

LXV. Let us go still further, and endeavour to trace a connected series, not of facts, but of notions; to sound the human heart, and to lay hold of that chain of errors, which, from a sentiment so just, simple and universal as that *there is a power above us*, conducted by degrees to the conception of deities, which a man would blush to resemble.

* Plut. de Placit. Philosoph. de Isid. et Osirid.

The senti-
ments of
uncivili-
zed men
confused.

Sentiment is only a conscious appeal to ourselves. Our ideas relate to objects without us; and by their number and diversity, enfeeble the sentiment. It is therefore among uncultivated savages, whose ideas are confined to their wants, and whose wants are simply those of nature, that the force of sentiment should be more keen and lively, altho' at the same time confused and indistinct. Savage man must be every moment in agitations he can neither explain nor suppress. Ignorant and weak, he is afraid of every thing, because he can defend himself from nothing. He admires every thing because he knows nothing. The despicable opinion he justly entertains of himself (for vanity is the creature of society) makes him perceive the existence of some superiour power. It is this power whose attributes

he

he is ignorant of, that he invokes, and of whom he asks assistance, without knowing what pretensions he may have to hope it will be granted. This sentiment, indistinct as it was, naturally produced the good deities of the primitive Greeks, and the divinities of most of the savage nations; none of whom, however, knew how to ascertain their number, attributes, or worship.

LXVI. This sentiment, in time, is modified into a notion. Savage man pays homage to every thing about him; as every thing seems to him more excellent than himself. The majestic oak, that shelters him with its spreading boughs, had afforded a shade to his ancestors, down from the first of his race. It lifted its head into the clouds, while the towering eagle lost itself in its branches. What was the

Every thing he sees becomes an object of adoration.

duration, the size, the strength, of an human creature, compared to such a tree? Gratitude next united itself to admiration. That oak, which afforded him plenty of acorns, the clear stream, at which he quenched his thirst, were his benefactors: they made his life comfortable; without them he could not subsist, while at the same time they stood in no need of him. In effect, without these lights, that enable us to see how much reason alone is superior to all those necessary parts of an intelligent system, every one of them is superior to man. But wanting such lights, savage man attributes life and power to them all; and prostrates himself before imaginary beings which he hath thus created.

His ideas
are singular.

LXVII. The ideas of uncivilized man are singular because they are simple. To remark the different qualities of objects,

to observe those which are common to many, and from that resemblance to form an abstract idea, representative of the genus of objects, without being the image of any one in particular : this is the operation of the understanding, which acts and reflects within itself ; and which, overstocked with ideas, thus endeavours to relieve itself by the forms of method. In a primitive state, the soul, passive and ignorant of its faculties, is capable only of receiving external impressions: these impressions represent only single objects, and in such a manner as they seem to exist in themselves. The savage therefore sees himself surrounded with deities : every field, every forest swarms with them.

LXVIII. Experience unfolds his ideas, He combines his ideas and multiplies his deities.
 for individuals as well as societies owe every
 thing to experience. A variety of objects

K 4

becoming

becoming familiar to his perceptions, he begins to discover their common nature, and this nature becomes a new divinity superior to all particular deities. But every thing that exists has its existence determined by time or place, which distinguish its identity. Now the human-mind would be differently influenced with regard to these two modes of existence; the one being plain and obvious to the senses, the other transient, metaphysical, and perhaps nothing more than the succession of our ideas. A common property, varied only in the mode of time, would eclipse all particular properties, whilst those which should be diversified in the mode of place, might subsist as distinct parts of a common property. The God of rivers lays an indisputed claim to his local rights on the

Tiber

Tiber and Clitumnus *; but the South-wind that blew yesterday, and that we feel to-day, are both the same blustering tyrant, that stirs up the mountainous waves of the Adriatic †.

LXIX. The more the mind exercises its thoughts, the more it combines its ideas. Combina-
tion of
ideas con-
tinued. Two species are different in some respects, and alike in others: they are destined to the same use, they are part of the same element. The stream of a fountain becomes a river, the river loses itself in the sea. This sea makes part of a vast ocean of waters, that encompass the whole earth: while the earth itself contains every thing

* Hist. de l'Acad. des Belles-Lettres, tom. xii. p. 36.—Plin. epist. lib. viii. epist. 8.

† Hor. Carm. lib. iii. Od. 3.

———Neque Ausfer
Dux inquieti turbidus Adriæ.

that

that subsists by the principle of vegetation. In proportion as mankind become enlightened, their idolatry would refine. They would become better able to perceive how the universe is governed by general laws ; and would approach nearer the unity of a sole, efficient cause. The Greeks could never generalize their ideas beyond the elements of water, earth and air ; which, under the names of Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto, comprehended and governed all things. But the Ægyptians, whose genius was better adapted to abstract speculations, arrived at length to their Osiris * or principal Divinity, an intelligent principle, which operated constantly on the material principle, couched under the name and personage of

* It is worth observing, that this Osiris and his sister were said to be the youngest of the deities. It required a great many ages for the Ægyptians to arrive at this simplicity.

Isis, his wife and sister. Those who believe in the eternity of matter, can hardly go farther than this *.

LXX. Jupiter, Neptune, and gristly Pluto were brothers; the branches of whose posterity spread themselves infinitely wide, and comprehended the whole system of nature. Such was the mythology of the ancients. To the ignorant, the idea of generation was more natural than that of creation. It was more easy for

The generation and hierarchy of Gods.

* The worship of the sun hath prevailed in all nations. I shall give what appear to me the reasons of it. It is perhaps the only object in the world that is at once sole and perceptible. Perceptible to all the nations upon earth, in the most brilliant and beneficent manner, it is no wonder it should attract their homage. Sole and indivisible, those who reasoned on the subject, and were not too difficult, discovered in it all the distinguishing marks of divinity.

them

them to acquire; and supposed less power exerted in the operation. This generation, however, led them to establish an hierarchy, which these beings, though free yet limited, could not possibly do without. Thus the three principal deities exercised a paternal authority over their children, dispersed in the air, over the earth and the sea. The primogeniture of Jupiter gave him also a superiority over his brothers, which intitled him to the name of the King of Gods and Father of Men. But this king, this supreme father, was too limited and impotent, in all respects, to suffer us to do the Greeks the honour of attributing to them the belief of a Supreme Being.

The Gods
of human
life. LXXI. This system, ill-constructed as it was, accounted for all the physical effects of nature. But the moral world, man,

man, his destiny, and actions were without divinities. The earth, or the air, had been ill-adapted deities. The want of new Gods, therefore, forged a new chain of errors, which, joined to the former, encircled the regions of theological romance. I suspect the latter system must take its rise very late; man never thinking of entering into himself, till he had exhausted external objects.

LXXII. There are two hypotheses The systems of liberty and necessity. which always have been, and ever will, subsist. In the one, man is supposed to have received from his Creator Reason and Will; that he is left to himself to put them to use, and regulate his actions accordingly. In the other, he is supposed incapable of acting otherwise than agreeable to the pre-established laws of the Deity,
of

of whom he is only the instrument : that his sentiment deceives him, and when he imagines he follows his own inclination, he in fact only pursues that of his master. The latter notion might be suggested to the minds of a people, little removed from a primitive state. Little instructed in the movements of so complicated a machine, they saw with admiration the great virtues, the atrocious crimes, the useful inventions of a few singular men, and thought they surpassed the powers of humanity. Hence they conceived, on every side, active deities, inspiring virtue and vice into weak mortals, incapable of resisting their impulsive influence *. It was not prudence

The ancients adopted the latter.

* I am not very well satisfied with this passage. I give the best reasons I can find ; but it seems to me, that, in such early ages, sentiment must have been their guide ; and sentiment speaks always in behalf of the system of liberty.

that

that inspired Pandarus with the design of breaking the truce, and of aiming a dart at the breast of Menelaus. It was the Goddess Minerva excited him to that attempt *. The unhappy Phedra was not criminal. No. It was Venus, who, irritated by the flights of Hippolitus, lighted up an incestuous flame in the heart of that Princess, which plunged her into guilt, infamy, and death †. Thus a Deity was supposed to undertake the charge of every event in life, of every passion of the soul, and every order of society.

* Homer. Iliad. lib. iv. v. 93, &c.

† ΑΛΛ' ΕΤΙ ΤΑΥΤΗ ΤΟΝ Δ' ΕΡΩΤΑ ΧΡΗ ΠΙΣΙΝ.

Δειξω δε Θησει πραγμα, κακφανησεται.

Και τον μεν ημιν πολεμιον πιφυκοτα

Κτενει πατρει, αραισι, —————

Η δ' ευκληης μεν, αλλ' ομως απολυται

Φαιδρα. ————— Eurip. Hippol. Act i. v. 40.

The union
of the two
species of
divinities.

LXXIII. These deities of the moral world, however, these passions and faculties so generalized and personated, had only a metaphysical existence, too occult for the generality of mankind. It became necessary, therefore, to incorporate them with the physical deities; in doing which, allegory has imagined a thousand fantastical relations; for the mind always requires at least the appearance of truth. It was natural enough for the God of the sea to be also that of the sailors. The figurative expression of the eye, that sees every thing at one view; of those rays, which dart thro' the immensity of the air, might easily be applied to the sun, and make an able prophet and a skilful archer, of that luminary. But wherefore must the planet Venus be the mother and goddess of love?

Why

Why must she take her rise out of the foam of the ocean? But we must leave these enigmas to such as may be able to interpret them. No sooner were these moral deities assigned their several departments, than, it is natural to conceive, they engrossed the homage of mankind. They had to do immediately with the heart and the passions, whereas the physical divinities, to whom no moral attributes had been given, fell insensibly into contempt and oblivion. Thus, it is only in the earliest ages of antiquity that I descry the smoke on the altars of Saturn *.

LXXIV. From this period the Gods ^{Possessed} became particularly interested in human ^{of human} affairs. Nothing passed of which they

* I mean among the Greeks; his worship was long kept up in Italy.

L

were

were not the authors. But were they the authors of injustice? We are startled at this conclusion: an heathen, however, did not hesitate to admit, and in fact could not doubt it. His Gods often suggested very vicious designs. To suggest them, it was necessary they should concur, and even take pleasure in them. They had not the resource of a small quantity of evil admissible into the best of possible worlds *. The evil, they were accessory to, was not only permitted, but authorized; besides, these several divinities, confined to their respective departments, were quite indifferent as to the general good; with which they had nothing to do. Every one acted agreeable to his own character, and inspired only the passions he was sup-

* See Fontenelle dans l'eloge de M. de Leibnitz.

posed to feel. The God of War was fierce, blood-thirsty and brutal; the Goddess of Wisdom, prudent and reserved: the Queen of Love, an amiable, voluptuous goddess, all charm and caprice: subtlety and low cunning distinguished the God of Trade; and the cries of the unhappy were supposed to please the ear of the inexorable tyrant o'er the dead, the gloomy Monarch of the infernal shades.

LXXV. A God, the Father of man-
 kind, is equally so to every individual of
 the species. He is incapable of love or
 hate. But partial divinities must, doubt-
 less, have their favourites. Could it be
 supposed they should not prefer those who
 most resembled themselves! Mars could
 not but love the Thracians, of whom war

These dei-
 ties re-
 specters
 of persons.

was the only occupation *; he could not but love those Scythians, whose most delicious potation was composed of the blood of their enemies †. The manners of the inhabitants of Cyprus and Corinth, where all was luxury, effeminacy and pleasure; must necessarily engage the Goddess of Love. It was but a grateful return, to prefer those people, whose manners were a kind of disguised homage to their tutelar divinities. That homage itself was always adapted to their character. The human victims, that expired on the altar of Mars ‡, those thousands of curtezans who devoted themselves to the services of

* Herodot. lib. v. c. 4, 5.—Minutius Fæl. Octav. c. 25. p. 258.—Lucian. Pharf. lib. i.

† Lactant. lib. i. c. 25.

‡ Strab. Geog. lib. viii. p. 378.

the temple of Venus *, those famous women of Babylon, who there made a sacrifice of their modesty †, could not but

* Herod. lib. i. c. 199.

† They were obliged to prostitute themselves, once in their lives, to the first comer, in the temple of Venus. Voltaire, who imposes on them the obligation of doing it every year, treats it as an idle and ridiculous fable (1). Herodotus, however, had travelled into these parts; and Mr. Voltaire is too well versed in history to be ignorant, how many similar triumphs superstition has made over humanity and virtue. What does he think of an act of faith? But I anticipate his answer. I was, besides, ignorant that Babylon was then the best governed city in the world. Quintus Curtius describes it as the most licentious. Berosus, the Babylonian himself, complains that his fellow-citizens, breaking down all the barriers of modesty, lived like brute beasts; and the scholiast upon Juvenal may inform us, that in his time it was not degenerated (2).

(1) Oeuvr. de Volt. tom. vi. p. 24.—(2) Quint. Curt. de Reb. Gest. Alex. lib. v. c. 1. et Comment. Freinsheim.

obtain, for their respective people, the most distinguished favour of their protectors. But as the interests of nations are not less opposite than their manners, it became necessary that these Gods should adopt the quarrels of their worshippers. “ What ! “ shall I patiently behold a city, that has “ erected a hundred temples to my divi- “ nity, fall before the sword of the con- “ queror ? No. Rather will I—.” It is thus that, among the Greeks, a war kindled on earth, soon lighted up the torch of discord in the skies. The siege of Troy put all heaven into confusion. The Scamander reflected the rays that darted from the Ægis of Minerva ; was witness of the fatal effect of the arrows taken from the quiver of Apollo, and felt the tremendous trident of Neptune shake the foundations

Their
quarrels.

dations of the earth. Sometimes indeed the irresistible decrees of Fate re-established peace *. But most generally the several deities mutually agreed to abandon each others enemies †; for on Olympus, as upon earth, hatred is always more powerful than friendship.

LXXVI. A refined homage was little suitable to such a kind of deities. The multitude required sensible objects; the image of something to decorate their temples, and fix their ideas. The choice, to be sure, must be fixed on the most amiable. But which is that? The human form will doubtless be preferred by men.

They assumed the human form.

* Mythol. de l'Abbé Bannier, tom. ii. p. 487.—Ovid. Metamorph. lib. xv.

† Eurip. Hippol. act v. ver. 1327.—Ovid Metamorph. passim.

Should a bull have answered the question, he would probably have determined in favour of some other *. Sculpture now began to improve itself in the service of devotion, and the temples were filled with statues of old men and young, women and children, expressive of the different attributes ascribed to their deities.

Were liable to corporeal pains and pleasures.

LXXVII. Beauty is perhaps only founded on use; the human figure being beautiful only because it is so well adapted to the functions to which it is destined. The figure of the divinity, the same, should be certainly expressive of its properties, and even of its defects. Hence came that absurd generation of deities, who composed only a celestial family, similar to those

* Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. i. c. 27, 28.

among

among mankind: hence their feasts of nectar and ambrosia, and the nourishment they were supposed to receive from the sacrifices. Hence also their quiet slumbers *, and their afflicting pains †. The Gods, thus become only a race of superior men, used often to make visits on earth, inhabit their temples, take pleasure in the amusements of mankind, join in the chase, mix in the dance, and sometimes grow susceptible of the charms of a mortal beauty, and give birth to a race of heroes.

LXXVIII. In those great events, where-^{Of gene-}
in, from the diversity of actors, whose^{ral events,}
views, situation, and character, are differ-

* Homer. Iliad. lib. i. v. 609.

† Id. Iliad. lib. v. ver. 335.

ent,

ent, there arises an unity of action, or rather of effect ; it is perhaps only into general causes we must look for the springs of those.

A mixture
of causes
in particu-
lar events.

LXXIX. In more particular events, the process of nature is very different from that of the philosophers. In nature there are few effects so simple as to owe themselves to one sole cause ; whereas our philosophers are generally attached to one cause, sole and universal. Let us avoid this precipice : on the contrary, if an action appears ever so little complicated, let us admit of general causes, not excluding either hazard or design. Sylla resigned the sovereignty of Rome. Cæsar lost it with his life : nevertheless their encroachments on liberty were alike preceded by their conquests : before they be-
came

came the most powerful, they became the most famous, among the Romans. Augustus trod nearly in the same steps. A sanguinary tyrant *, suspected of cowardice, that greatest of all crimes in the leader of a party †, he reached the throne, and soon made those republicans forget they had ever been free. Indeed the disposition of those people diminishes my surprize. Equally incapable of liberty under Sylla as under Augustus, they were ignorant of this truth in the time of the former : a civil war and two proscriptions, more cruel and bloody than that war itself, had taught them, by the time of the lat-

The elevation of Augustus.

* After the taking of Perugia, he sacrificed three hundred of the principal citizens upon an altar erected to the divinity of his father.

Sueton. lib. ii. c. 15.

† Sueton. lib. ii. c. 16.

ter,

ter, that the republic, sinking beneath the weight of its greatness and corruption, could not subsist without a master. Besides, Sylla, one of the first of the nobles, fought at the head of those haughty Patricians, who, tho' they put a sword into the hand of despotism to avenge themselves of their enemies, would not leave it there with the power of converting it to the destruction of themselves. They had conquered with him, not for him: the harangue of Lepidus *, and the conduct of Pompey †, make it sufficiently clear, that Sylla chose rather to descend from his invidious situation, than be thrown headlong from it. But Augustus, after the ex-

* Sallust. Fragm. p. 404. Edit. Thyfii.

† Frensheim. Supplem. lib. lxxxix. c. 26 à 33.

ample of Cæsar *, employed only those enterprising adventurers, Agrippa, Mecenas, and Pollio, whose fortunes, attached to his, had been nothing divided among an aristocracy of nobles, but were when united sufficient to crush a new pretender.

LXXX. Those fortunate circumstances ^{The} of the debauchery of Anthony, the weak- ^{causes of} it, ness of Lepidus, and the credulity of Cicero, operated in concert with the general disposition, in his favour: but it must be confessed, that tho' he did not give birth to these circumstances, he employed them with great art and policy. The vast variety of objects, that present themselves, will not permit to display the nature of that refined government; to de-

* Tacit. Annal. lib. iv. p. 109.—Sueton. ubi infra.

scribe the yoke that was borne without being felt, the Prince undistinguished from the citizens, or the senate respected by its master *. We will select, however, one circumstance.

Augustus, master of the revenues of the empire, and the riches of the world, constantly distinguished between his own par-

* It is with impatience I expect the continuation of those dissertations on this subject, which M. de la Bleterie hath promised us. The system of Augustus, so often misunderstood, will be laid down with the utmost minuteness. This author hath a peculiar delicacy, and an amiable freedom, of sentiment. He is argumentative without dryness, and expresses himself with all the graces of a clear and elegant style. Perhaps, however, this Descartes of history reasons a little too much *a priori*, and founds his conclusions less upon authority of particular facts, than on general induction: but this is the fault only of men of great genius.

ticular

ticular patrimony and the treasure of the public. By which means he displayed his moderation, in having bequeathed to his heirs effects of less value than the fortunes of many of his subjects * ; and his love to his country, in having given up to the service of the state two entire patrimonies ; together with an immense sum, arising from the legacies of his deceased friends.

LXXXI. An ordinary degree of penetration is sufficient to discover when an action is at once both cause and effect. The same action both cause and effect.
In the moral world there are many such ; or rather, there are but few, which do not,

* Augustus bequeathed to Tiberius and Livia only millies quingenties, thirty millions of livres. The augur Lentulus died in his reign, worth quarter millies, fourscore millions. Sueton. lib. ii. c. 101.—Seneca de Benefic. lib. ii.

more or less, partake of both the one and the other.

The corruption of all orders of men among the Romans, was owing to the extent of their empire, and was itself productive of the greatness of the republic *.

But it requires an uncommon share of judgment, when two things are constantly united, and seem intimately connected, to discern that they are neither effect nor cause to one another.

* Montesq. Confid. sur la Grandeur des Romains.

I distinguish the greatness of the Roman empire from that of the republic: the one consisted in the number of provinces, the other in that of its citizens.

LXXXII. The sciences, it is said, take <sup>The sci-
ences do
not arise
from luxu-</sup> their rise from luxury; an enlightened ^{ry.} must be always a vicious people. For

my part, I cannot be of this opinion. The sciences are not the daughters of luxury, but both the one and the other owe their birth to industry. The arts, in their rudest state, satisfied the primitive wants of men. In their state of perfection they suggest new ones, even from Vitellius's shield of Pallas*, to the philosophical entertainments of Cicero. But in proportion as luxury corrupts the man-

* Vitellius sent his gal'ies as far as the pillars of Hercules, in order to catch the uncommon and delicate fish, of which this luxurious dish was composed. If we may credit Dr. Arbuthnot, it cost 765,625 l. Sterling. See Sueton. in Vitellio, c. 13. Arbuthnot's Tables, p. 138.

ners, the sciences soften them ; like to those prayers in Homer, which constantly pursue injustice, to appease the fury of that cruel deity *.

Conclu-
sion.

Thus have I thrown together a few reflections, which appeared to me just and rational, on the utility of the Belles-Lettres. Happy should I think myself, if, by so doing, I should inspire a taste for them in others. I should entertain too good an opinion of myself, if I did not see the imperfections of this Essay ; and should have too bad a one if I did not hope, at an age less premature, and with a more extensive knowlege, to be able to correct

* Μετῴσιθ' αὐτῆς ἀλεγεινῆς κίβδα.

Homer. Iliad. lib. ix. v. 500.

them.

them. It may possibly be said, these reflections are just, but hackneyed and trite, or that they are new, but paradoxical. Where is the author who loves the critics? The former imputation, however, will displease me least; the advantage of the art being more dear to me than the reputation of the artist.

THE END.

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